

THE HIGH HAND



JACQUES FUTRELLE

Philip Durham

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THE HIGH HAND



"I have the impression of having met you somewhere"

THE HIGH HAND

BY
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BLUSIVE ISABEL, ETC.

With Illustrations by
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CHAPTER I

THE MAKER OF PLOWS

OUT of the chaos of mediocrity he came, Jim Warren, of Warburton—up through the murk of the foundry, the din of the steel room, the clangor of the machine-shop; up by brawn and brain, until one day quite naturally he took his place at the big flat-topped desk in the superintendent's office, away from and yet within sound of the roar of machinery and the thunder of trip-hammers. He loved the mighty smashing and the crashing of the trip-hammers. There was something sinister and merciless in the ponderous power behind the straight-out spurt of sparks from white-hot metal; and yet, so gentle was it, so per-

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fectly could that vast power be held in check, that a steady hand might shell peanuts with it and not so much as bruise a kernel. He liked to remember that there had been a time when he could shatter the crystal of a watch with a ten-ton blow so accurately calculated that the hands of the watch, a hair's breadth away, were not touched. He used to do it occasionally for the amusement of visitors to the factory.

One such incident he had always remembered. Mr. Chase, manager of the factory, had brought two persons into the room where the trip-hammers toiled—a man and a girl. He hadn't noticed the man, for the girl had filled his gaze—a child of fifteen she was, slim and wonder-eyed. She had seemed so out of place there in the grime and the smoke and the glare of the furnaces. The three of them paused outside the circle of flying sparks; and, fascinated, breathless, she watched him as he worked. Finally Mr. Chase, with some re-

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mark to the child, laid his watch upon the anvil beneath the great hammer and nodded to Jim Warren. The hammer descended once. Mr. Chase picked up the watch and handed it to the girl. Its crystal was crushed to a powder. The girl held it to her ear for an instant, then laughed delightedly and placed her own watch, a tiny, fragile trinket, upon the anvil. Again the hammer fell. Jim Warren had never forgotten the expression on her face as she came forward timidly and took the watch in her hand. Its crystal had merely been cracked! He had never seen the girl again, but he remembered that she smiled back at him as she went out.

That had been eight or nine years ago. Shortly afterward he had been placed in charge of the machine-shop and, three or four years later, had taken his place at the superintendent's desk. Lean and sinewy he was now as in those days in the hammer room—as hard of fist, as strong of jaw; but many refine-

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ments had come to him. The grime had worked out. His eyes were bluer here in the office, away from the glow of the furnaces; his hair was redder and his freckles stood forth in all their pristine glory against his cleaner, fairer skin. Remained that haunting suggestion of a grin about his mouth, a whimsical eccentricity radiating out of honest optimism; remained his ready laugh and his sheer, healthy animalism; remained his love for his work and the cleanliness of mind which grew out of it. And to this had been added something, a personal absolutism, a necessary touch of authority, an utter self-reliance and that indefinable quality which comes from wide reading and wider understanding.

For a time Jim Warren had been content with the future as he saw it. Some day when Mr. Chase chose to retire he would be made manager of this big factory with its fifteen hundred men; perhaps he might become even a stock-holder, for he had saved something out

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of his two thousand a year—so, until his field of vision was unexpectedly widened and a great dazzling perspective opened before him. In that instant ambition was born. It came through a casual question put to him by old Bob Allaire, a grizzled veteran of the foundry.

“Why don’t you go into politics, super?” the old man had asked. “Us fellows who work for a livin’ are good and plenty tired o’ this here Francis Everard Lewis. He’s too busy makin’ his own pile to do anything for us and we’d put out a labor candidate in a minute if we could find the man. Might not do much this time, but looks to me like you might have a chance next time. They’re fifteen hundred of us in the shops and twelve hundred’d vote for you for anything from street-sweeper to president. Only reason the other three hundred won’t vote for you is ’cause they’re under age; but if the wust comes to the wust”—and the old man chuckled—“we’ll make ’em vote anyhow.”

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The possibility of a political career had never occurred to Jim Warren until that moment, but the thought stole through him warmly, as the glow of wine. He seemed pre-occupied as he made his way back to the office and, once there, he sat for an hour staring out unseeingly upon the ugly litter of the iron-yard. After all, this work of his was very monotonous, humdrum, prosaic, uninteresting. Suddenly that contented future that he had grown to look forward to grew empty in prospect. It meant nothing. Even as manager—and it might be a dozen years before he won that place—there would be nothing beyond. But in the political field there would be no limit to ambition; he might go on, and on, and on!

Knowing nothing of politics beyond the casual chitchat of the newspapers—and he had read little of that—Jim Warren started out to learn something. It was not that he had decided to take a hand in the game; he was merely looking over the rules. The further he went

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in his quest for information the more astonished he was at the conditions he found in his own particular city and his own particular state. Commonplace enough they were, but marvelous and incomprehensible to Jim Warren, because he had known nothing of such things in the beginning. He had heard rumors, yes; but here he was finding them to be true!

On the one hand was Francis Everard Lewis, who, beginning as a penniless lawyer a dozen years previously, had risen to opulence in the ten years he had been in the legislature from the Warburton district on a salary of eight hundred dollars a year! He had no other income and made no further pretense of practising his profession. Yet, not only had he grown rich, but he had become political dictator of his end of the state. His power was absolute, his will undisputed within his own kingdom. He made men and unmade them at a word; he made laws and unmade them at a

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nod; his host of followers stuck like hound to heel.

Jim Warren wondered.

On the other hand, Big Tom Simmonds, a saloon-keeper, who, in those scant years when his machine was able to wrest the city of Warburton from Lewis' grip, was monarch of all he surveyed. His throne was a small round table in an obscure corner of his bar-room. In power he was a despot, jamming ordinances of his own liking down the throat of his city, grabbing a contract here and there, selling a franchise now and then; and when out of power he spent his time planning to get back. He, too, had grown opulent and fat. There was no enmity between Francis Everard Lewis and Big Tom Simmonds. They understood each other perfectly.

Commonplace enough, all this, as I have said, but Jim Warren's clean mind, failing to understand how such conditions had become possible, reeled at the rottenness of it all. Two

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or three things he could lay his calloused hands on and understand. First and foremost, of course, Lewis was a crook, else he could never have done the things he had done and grown rich at it; he could never have held his power save by corruption and the prostitution of office, and bribery; and if he had given bribes some one had received them! Big Tom Simmonds was of the same type, cast in a coarser mold.

So this was the particular brand of political knavery that afflicted his city and state! An unpalatable mess, on the surface at least; but what a gorgeous opportunity for a young man who was immune to the lure of gold! In the matter of legislation he would be useless single-handed, but if he got in right what a stunning blow he could kick up! But getting in right!—how could it be done? He would have to pass in review before one or both of the bosses—Lewis and Simmonds—and kotow to the earth. But if he could get his hooks in—

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It was in contemplation of this evil brew that an idea came to Jim Warren—the big idea! Slowly, as the big idea disseminated itself through his gray matter and he was able to get a good grip on it, a grin grew on his face. The grin became a chuckle, the chuckle a deep-throated laugh. Then suddenly his freckled face became grave, his sky-blue eyes deeply thoughtful, his whimsical mouth hard-set.

“Obviously,” he said to himself, “this game is played with marked cards. I think I’ll mark me a pack and sit in. If I can get by once with any job, city or state, I’ll”—he laughed nervously—“hang it, I’ll be the next governor.”

CHAPTER II

JIM WARREN SITS IN

“**W**HEN a wise man wants water,” says the yogi, “he goes to the well.” Likewise, when a wise man wants a political job he goes to the source of supply. So, unashamed, Jim Warren called at the Hotel Stanton, where Francis Everard Lewis lived, and inquired for him. The clerk was sorry, but Mr. Lewis was out of town and wouldn’t return for two or three days. However, there was his confidential man, Mr. Franques—“that gentleman standing just by the marble column looking this way.”

Jim Warren had heard of Lewis’ henchman, so he turned now and look at him curiously. He had expected a round-paunched, red-faced, short-legged, diamond-bespangled individual—

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a sort of sublimated heeler type; he saw, instead, a tall, lank, swarthy, graven-faced, dusty-looking person, well past middle age, with a pair of evil eyes in the head of him. It just happened at that instant that Franques was making an inventory of Jim Warren's person; and Jim Warren felt, oddly, that some one was going through him with a search-warrant. Quite involuntarily he put his hand on his watch, after which he went forward and introduced himself.

Yes, Franques knew who he was—superintendent of the Atlas Plow Works, wasn't he? If his business with Mr. Lewis wasn't personal— Political? Oh, yes. Would he mind stating it? Mr. Lewis was a very busy man and matters of this sort were usually referred to him, Franques. Perhaps they could talk better at a little place he knew around the corner. If Mr. Warren would go ahead he would join him there in five minutes.

So, in this casual manner, they met and

JIM WARREN SITS IN

talked—that is, Jim Warren talked while Franques listened—talked with a naïveté and frankness and directness that Franques had never met before in a grown-up man. It was a candid statement of his desire to get into the political game and an outline of his hopes and his ambitions, made without reserve. Coupled therewith was a casual mention of the fact that he had twelve hundred labor votes laid by for a rainy day; and as labor wanted a candidate there was no reason why the loyalty and zeal of those twelve hundred should not win others.

“But will those men disregard party ties to vote for you?” Franques wanted to know. His beady eyes were fixed intently, searchingly, upon Jim Warren’s face.

“They will,” Jim Warren asserted without hesitation. “I’ve worked with ’em for years; they’re friends of mine. They like me and believe in me. They would do things for me.”

“And what particular office do you want?”

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"I don't know," Jim Warren confessed with a grin. "What have you got?"

Franques disregarded the question.

"Suppose," he asked in turn—"suppose Mr. Lewis or—or some one else, say, should interest himself in your behalf?"

"I'd do the proper thing by him, of course, whatever it is."

"And then, suppose he shouldn't?"

"Well"—again that grin—"I'd just naturally have to get into the game anyway. I don't know if you know it, but there's quite a lot of feeling against Lewis among the men who work, and twelve hundred votes will do to start with. I could poll the vote of my factory solidly against Lewis or any other man. I'd rather have Lewis' support. Do you get it?"

That's about all there was to that first interview. Jim Warren went out and Franques sat musing for a long time with a strange light playing in his evil eyes. Vaguely he felt that at last he had found a man he had been look-

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ing for. Jim Warren's red head and his square jaw and the wholesome manner of him were political assets. A man of his personality would have to be reckoned with if, by any chance, he should get into the game.

"But he's a fool in politics—simple as a child," he mused. The thought seemed to please him, for his thin lips writhed in a smile. "I think, Jim Warren"—he added after a moment—"I think we may be able to do some business—you and I."

Meanwhile Jim Warren passed down the street with an exultant grin on his freckled face, his heels clicking cheerfully on the sidewalk.

"I think, Mr. Franques," he observed enigmatically—"I think I slipped one over on you that time!"

Three or four days later there was a second interview between Jim Warren and Franques. This time Franques did most of the talking.

"I've been feeling out public opinion, Mr.

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Warren," he began slowly, "and frankly I am surprised at the sentiment in favor of a labor candidate—surprised at the strength of that sentiment. There seems to be a certain ill feeling toward Mr. Lewis that—"

"There is," Jim Warren agreed.

"And a particularly strong feeling for the right man—Jim Warren."

"Yes?" Jim Warren gasped.

"Also," Franques went on unemotionally, "I've been making some inquiries about Jim Warren. One must know people with whom one does business. I am told that Warren is a man who will do a thing if he says he will."

"He will."

"I am informed that if Jim Warren makes a bargain he will stick to it?"

"He will."

"I infer that if Jim Warren should be placed in a public office and it should be in his power to—to favor the man who had placed him there, he would do it?"

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"He would."

"I infer that if I should make a proposition—an unusual one—to Jim Warren he would either accept it or"—the beady eyes were alive as coals—"or turn it down and keep his mouth shut?"

"He would."

"I imagine Jim Warren would be grateful enough to the man who had made him politically to be guided to a certain extent by that man's advice in public affairs."

"He would."

For a long time the eyes of the two men met unwaveringly. There was nervous exultation in Jim Warren's face; Franques' was inscrutable as stone.

"In view of all this," Franques broke the silence, "I'm going to make a proposition that will astonish you. You may take it or leave it. I shall only ask a promise of absolute silence on your part if you refuse it."

"I promise," said Jim Warren.

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And Franques made his proposition. Jim Warren listened, while his sky-blue eyes grew large with wonder, amazement, pleasure; his grin became a fixture; his sinewy fingers were interlaced. The big idea was coming through! Lewis' henchman was making it possible! It was all as if this proposition had been planned to further the big idea! . . . Franques stopped, with an abrupt question:

"Yes or no?"

"Yes!" said Jim Warren.

"Very well—that's all there is to it!" Franques arose. "I think I've explained everything that's necessary. My motives are not germane to the matter in hand. Of course, you understand we must not see each other again; we must be wholly disassociated. Any communication between us, however urgent, must be through indirect channels."

"I get you!" said Jim Warren.

Shortly before four o'clock the next afternoon Jim Warren sent an office boy to the

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heads of the various departments of the shops with the request that immediately after the whistle blew at quitting time the men should assemble in the iron-yard; he would detain them only a moment. There, mounted on a heap of pig-iron, he addressed them.

"Boys," he said, "I just want to tell you that I'm a candidate for the legislature, to succeed Francis Everard Lewis. He has held the job for ten years, and has built one tenement house for every one of those years—on a salary of eight hundred dollars per! He stands for the octopus; I stand for you fellows. I'm after his scalp. Are you with me?"

There was an astonished silence for one second, then a yelp of approval. Through the tumult came shrilly the voice of old Bob Al-laire:

"Go to him, Jim; go to him!"

"There's a little job of housework to be done in the capitol that'll make the cleaning of the Augean stables look like an odd job for a

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carpet-sweeper," Jim Warren went on. "Take it from me, I'm going to do that bit of housework. Before I finish the crooks'll be diving out of the windows."

That was Jim Warren's first political speech.

CHAPTER III

A MAN, A GIRL AND A DOG

JIM WARREN left the revolving door of the Sandringham National Bank fairly spinning behind him as he entered and strode across the tessellated floor to the nearest wicket in the polished brass grating. The wan wisp of a clerk raised his tired, uninterested gaze from his books; as he met this red-headed person face to face he smiled. They always did; that was one of Jim Warren's political assets.

"Hello!" Jim Warren greeted cheerily. "Is President Chisholm here?"

"Yes, sir; but just at the moment he's engaged," replied the clerk. "Perhaps the cashier or his assistant—"

"No; it's a personal matter," Jim Warren interrupted. "I've a letter of introduction to

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him. Please tell him I'm here—Jim Warren, of Warburton."

The clerk nodded and summoned a uniformed page, who took the message and vanished in the labyrinthine corridors of brass.

"Mr. Chisholm will see you in ten minutes, sir," he reported on his return.

"All right, sonny."

Day by day at a given time the picture in the outer office of a bank is always the same. There's the special officer leaning bulkily against a pillar with the weight of the world on his brow; a fat woman at a small table drawing a check and making a hard job of it; a nervous, bald-headed man trying to negotiate a note for seven hundred and thirty-eight dollars, said note being unindorsed; four or five heterogeneous persons lined up in front of the paying teller's window, and here and there some one waiting.

In this instance there were two persons waiting—Jim Warren and a girl—a pretty girl, a

A MAN, A GIRL AND A DOG

distractingly pretty girl. Jim Warren glanced at her because she was pretty; and his gaze lingered because of a vague impression that he had seen her somewhere before. There was something oddly familiar in her graceful slenderness, in the tilt of her head, in the set of her straight shoulders. The girl glanced at him quite casually and for an instant their eyes met. Somewhere at some time he had seen her before. He wondered where!

Enter—the dog; just a plain dog with a leg on each corner and a tail at the far end; a spotted dog, with his wanton hide tucked full of reckless deviltry. He had followed a customer into the bank and, having nothing better to do, decided to make friends with this red-headed man. Jim Warren snapped his fingers; the dog crouched playfully and barked.

“None of that, young fellow!” Jim Warren warned. “That big man over there with all that uniform on will get your number!”

“Woof!” said the dog.

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Given one dog, one red-headed young man and a distractingly pretty girl ten feet away, it was inevitable that something should happen. Something did. The distractingly pretty girl began it by dropping a glove. Jim Warren stepped forward to restore it. The dog, quick to see the opportunity for a game, beat Jim Warren to it. In just eight seconds the dog, with the glove dangling from his mouth, was all over the shop, with Warren in hot pursuit. The special officer looked on heavily.

"Goodness!" said the distractingly pretty girl.

"Confound you!" said Jim Warren. "Come here and I'll kick all the spots off you!"

"This is bully!" said the dog.

And there they went. Patiently and systematically Jim Warren chevied the dog around the office. A dozen times he stretched out a hand and grasped—the air. Finally he stopped and glanced helplessly at the distractingly pretty girl. She smiled; he grinned.

A MAN, A GIRL AND A DOG

"Don't trouble yourself," she protested. "It doesn't matter, really."

"I'll get it," Jim Warren declared. "Come here, you brute!"

"Woof!"

"Nice doggie! Bring it here!"

"Woof! Woof!"

Scoldings, coaxings, threatenings, beggings—they all came to the same. Finally the special officer deigned to unbend his bulk and join in the chase. Attacked in the rear the dog whirled. At just that psychological instant Jim Warren's fingers closed on his tail and the game was over.

The distractingly pretty girl was smiling when he returned the glove to her.

"Thank you so much," she said.

"I'm afraid he's ruined it," Jim Warren apologized. "He's a mischievous little—"

He stopped suddenly and stared at the watch on her bosom—a tiny, fragile trinket. When he looked up her eyes were fixed on his. He

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had seen her before, but—where? When? How? As he looked it occurred to him there was something of his own perplexity in her face.

"It doesn't matter, really," she was saying. "It's too bad you should have put yourself to so much trouble."

"No trouble at all," he replied vacantly. Again his eyes traveled to the watch on her bosom. "I beg your pardon," he said hastily.

Seemingly oblivious of his embarrassment, the girl smiled again and the incident was closed. The uniformed page spoke to him.

"Mr. Chisholm will see you now, sir."

Jim Warren was just about to pass through the door into the president's private suite when he met a man coming out—a smug, complacent, round-faced individual with puffy eyes. Jim Warren recognized him instantly. It was Dwight Tillinghast, speaker of the legislature; he had seen photographs and cartoons of him too often to make a mistake. Tillinghast stared

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at him oddly and, after Jim Warren had disappeared inside, turned and glanced back at the door.

Evidently the distractingly pretty girl had been waiting for Tillinghast.

"Papa," she queried, "do you know the young man you met at the door?"

"His name is Warren," he replied absently—"Jim Warren, of Warburton."

"Who is he?"

"Nobody particularly," was the reply. "Another upstart who has announced himself for the legislature against Lewis."

"Oh!" said the distractingly pretty girl. She followed him out the door in silence. "His face was familiar somehow. I must have seen his photograph in one of the newspapers."

"I dare say."

They walked on. The distractingly pretty girl didn't mention the incident of the glove. There was no reason why she should; she just didn't.

CHAPTER IV

THE SEALED PACKET

MR. CHISHOLM didn't trouble himself to rise when Jim Warren entered; for a moment he didn't even look around—merely continued writing. Jim Warren sat down.

"Well, Mr. Warren?" he queried abruptly at last. "You have a letter of introduction to me?"

"From Mr. Chase, of the Atlas Plow Works," Jim Warren volunteered.

Mr. Chisholm looked interested.

"Oh, I didn't know," he said half apologetically. "Glad to see you."

He read the letter, then turned in his chair and settled back for a good look at his visitor.

"So you're the young man who's been kicking up the row in Warburton?" he asked.

THE SEALED PACKET

"The same." Jim Warren grinned.

"It seems your announcement for the legislature to oppose Lewis has started things going down there?"

"It's done all of that." Jim Warren grinned again. "And I haven't really begun yet," he explained. "One or two labor organizations have declared for me and Lewis' machine was a bit surprised—that's all."

"I see. What are your politics?"

"Haven't any. I'm going to be elected to the legislature on suspicion—suspicion that if I'm not entirely honest I am, at least, a darned sight more honest than some of the other men Warburton has sent up here—Francis Everard Lewis in particular."

Mr. Chisholm smiled courteously.

"But you'll have to have the indorsement of one of the machines, of course?"

"Not enough to notice. What's going to happen is the machines will go cahoots to clean me up. Lewis and Simmonds will make some

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sort of deal—and I may add that I'm going to whale the life out of all of 'em."

"Well, this is interesting," and the smile broadened on Mr. Chisholm's face. "Of course, I know nothing about it, but I've always heard the machines there were invincible?"

"They have been, but I'm just on the verge of getting a strangle hold on 'em and it's all off. I am going to get their goat."

Mr. Chisholm laughed outright. It was so unusual an occurrence—his laughing—that his secretary turned and stared at him. Jim Warren winked at her solemnly.

"Well, if you win what can you do?" Mr. Chisholm felt refreshed, exhilarated by contact with this man; the lines of his face relaxed; he was enjoying himself. "You are only one man—you'll have only one vote. Of course, you'll have to tie up with one of the big parties if you are elected?"

"Not this summer." Jim Warren grinned

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again. "I'll play the hand as it's dealt. Whatever else I do, I am going to clean that capitol of crooks; and, as I understand it now, that'll leave no one there but me and the elevator man." He paused. "And he may go," he added.

The business of being president of a bank tends to make skeptics of men. Mr. Chisholm was a skeptic.

"So you're going to reform the state, are you?" he asked slowly. "That's what all reformers say. I don't mean to reflect on your intentions," he hastened to add. "I am merely stating a platitude."

"I get you," and Jim Warren nodded. "I'm the exception, you see. Previous to this all freshmen in politics have gone in to take the dilemma by the horns. Well, I'm going to take it by the tail. Not only will I make Lewis quit in this fight, but I'm going to be the next governor of this state"—there was not the slightest trace of doubt in his manner—"and

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if I like that job I may decide to be president—I don't know."

For an instant Mr. Chisholm merely stared at Jim Warren the while he permitted himself to philosophize upon the rashness of youth, the absurdity of exaggeration, and a few other things to the point; then suddenly the ease of his manner fell away from him. He was the curt, busy banker again.

"I believe, Mr. Warren, you came to see me on business?"

"Yes; but before we go any further would you mind answering just one question? Is Dwight Tillinghast connected with your bank in any capacity?"

"No; he's merely a depositor. Why?"

"I just wanted to know. I met him as I came in. My business is very simple: I want to rent a box in your safe-deposit vault."

"Is that all?" Mr. Chisholm seemed to be surprised. "One of the clerks will attend to it for you."

THE SEALED PACKET

"Not the way I want to do it," Jim Warren explained. "I want to deposit in that box a sealed packet, with the stamp of the bank upon it; and I want attached to that your affidavit and two others stating that the packet was deposited this day. I'll keep the key of that box, but it is never to be opened except in the presence of all those persons whose names appear upon the sealed packet inside. Of course, you'll have to give the necessary orders for all this, and—"

Mr. Chisholm swung about in his swivel chair and faced Jim Warren.

"There's a lot of red tape about it," he objected.

"I know it," Jim Warren agreed complacently. "It was because of this I took the trouble to bring a letter of introduction from Mr. Chase. It will be a bit of trouble, too; especially as I expect to put other sealed packets in the box from time to time in the same manner."

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Mr. Chisholm glanced over the letter of introduction for the second time. The Sandringham National Bank was the general repository of the Atlas Plow Works, thanks to Mr. Chase, the manager.

"Well, of course, there's no objection to this rigmarole," Mr. Chisholm said curtly at last—"no objection; only a great deal of trouble."

"I'm sorry," said Jim Warren cheerfully. "Now, if you'll fix up some sort of paper stating in what manner and under what circumstances the box is to be opened—I understand, of course, that will become a part of the bank records?"

"Naturally," said Mr. Chisholm. The necessary paper was drawn up in duplicate. "Now the packet, please."

Jim Warren produced it, a long, legal-looking envelope that seemed to contain only a single sheet of paper. Mr. Chisholm weighed it in his hand with growing curiosity.

"For Heaven's sake, what's in it?" he asked,

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half smiling. It was not that he meant to be inquisitive; it was merely that the extraordinary precautions Jim Warren was taking to protect this lonesome sheet of paper seemed out of all proportion.

"I told you I was going to clean house at the capitol, didn't I?" Jim Warren laughed. "Well, that's the broom."

Patiently enough Mr. Chisholm fulfilled Jim Warren's wishes in the matter and, with a word of thanks, Jim Warren went his way. His under jaw was thrust forward, his sky-blue eyes for the instant had lost their lurking twinkle.

"Governor of this state!" he mused. On the crest of a hill a short distance away rose the dome of the capitol. "Governor of this state! No man can stop me!"

For no particular reason there flashed across his inner vision the image of a girl—a distractingly pretty girl. She was smiling.

"Where did I see her before?" he wondered.

CHAPTER V

JIM WARREN DEALS A HAND

FRANCIS EVERARD LEWIS was a nearsilk-stocking in politics—suave, soft-spoken, bold, cynical and conscienceless, selfish of his own power, merciless in his vengeance; altogether a young man—he was thirty-six as against Jim Warren's thirty-two—altogether a young man to be reckoned with and consulted and pacified. Assiduous attention to the interests of people who had interests to protect had lifted him to his commanding position politically, had furthered his ambitions socially and had exalted him financially. As he climbed, the mere friction of contact had given him a superficial polish; but beneath that flimsy veneer was cunning and avariciousness and an unholy lust for power. From the viewpoint of

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the octopus he was an ideal man; and, this being true, the octopus was pleased to be permitted to eat out of his hand. He had had opposition at times. Some of it he had talked to death, some of it he had smashed, and some of it he had bought outright, for the treasure vaults of the octopus poured forth a flood of gold at his "Open sesame!"

When Jim Warren appeared on the horizon Lewis was in the ascendancy and coming to his zenith. At the previous session he had routed opposition and personally named the speaker of the legislature, one Dwight Tillinghast. Tillinghast was one of those innocuously rich men who had never been dishonest for the sole reason, perhaps, that it had never been necessary for him to be dishonest; and he was blessed with a conscience that worked on a sliding scale. He was an ideal mask for the machinations of Lewis; and, seeing this, Lewis had made him speaker. Immediately after that he had dangled the governorship before Til-

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linghast's eyes, whereupon Tillinghast became clay in his hands. In the course of events, all things going well, Lewis would make him governor, and then— The boss licked his chops in contemplation.

This being the condition, it was not odd, therefore, that men smiled at Jim Warren's modest announcement of his intention of making Lewis climb a tree and pull the tree up after him, while the flippant assertion made so little impression upon Lewis himself that he actually forgot to inquire of Franques, who knew everybody, just who Jim Warren was. Instead, he went away motoring.

Now the octopus is legitimate prey. Grasping it firmly by the tail, Jim Warren proceeded to tear great handfuls of feathers out of it, after which he held it aloft and summoned the world to witness its naked shame. It was some time before the octopus noticed that anything unusual was going on—or coming off. The fact that it had noticed became evident one

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day when Franques received and opened a terse note addressed to Lewis. It contained a few tart inquiries: Who the deuce was Jim Warren? Was he, Lewis, going to beat him? If so, how? Would he need any help?

Franques forwarded the terse note to Lewis.

"Jim Warren is a fool, as any other man is a fool who tries to beat me in my own district," Lewis wrote easily in answer—"a two-dollar-a-day fool, without party affiliation or following. I'll beat him, of course. However, it might be well to make an example of the fellow; so, any help you may see fit to extend in these circumstances—et cetera, et cetera."

Soothed by this assurance of the man who, above all others, ought to know, the octopus didn't squirm again for ten days or so; and it didn't press the offer of help for the simple reason that it would have cost money, and the octopus is a frugal fish. The occasion of its next squirm was when Jim Warren related a little of the inside history of a railroad deal by

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which Warburton had been euchered out of divers and sundry municipal advantages, thanks to Lewis' knavery. He called spades spades and bribery bribery. Another terse note from the octopus; Franques telegraphed it to Lewis in code.

"Guesswork," Lewis replied to the octopus.

"Please take immediate steps to prevent Jim Warren from guessing so accurately," ordered the octopus.

"Where does Jim Warren get his information?" Lewis queried of Franques.

"You can search me!" Franques replied.

"Don't let it happen again," Lewis wired to Franques; and he kept on motoring.

When Jim Warren emerged from the dust he had kicked up he found that he had become the picturesque figure of the campaign. His fight was news; and there it was in the paper—right next to live reading matter. One or two newspapers, not overfriendly to Lewis, interviewed him. Where did he get his infor-

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mation? Jim Warren grinned. Who did he represent? Every honest man. But what party? None. Would he fight in either caucus? No. Oh, he'd be an independent candidate at the primaries? No. Did he mean he'd run with no indorsement? That's what he meant. Well, how did he happen to be in the running, anyhow? He'd simply declared himself in. What was his platform? The honesty of Jim Warren as opposed to the crookedness of Francis Everard Lewis. Sort of holier-than-thou candidate? Uh-huh. He never had held office? Not yet. Did he actually expect to be elected? He actually did.

That's all there was to that. On the tail of a tip-cart, with his coat off and his hat slanted over his left ear, Jim Warren knew no master. A night or so later he proved that to the eminent satisfaction of a small crowd of working-men—he proved it by the reading of two notes. The first was addressed to Francis Everard Lewis. It inquired tartly: Who the deuce is

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Jim Warren? Are you going to beat him? If so, how? Will you need any help? Then Jim Warren read the answer to that, *signed* by Francis Everard Lewis. It was like this:

“Jim Warren is a fool, as any other man is a fool who tries to beat me in my own district—a two-dollar-a-day fool, without party affiliation or following. I’ll beat him, of course. However, it might be well to make an example of the fellow; so, any help you may see fit to extend in these circumstances—et cetera, et cetera.”

Next morning three newspapers published facsimiles of the original letters; incidentally two of them declared war on Lewis. Whoever and whatever Jim Warren was, one pointed out, he was at least to be preferred to this man Lewis, whose long-suspected connection with corporations was now indisputably shown. Or, if the voters felt that Jim Warren was not the man for the place, some other man of known integrity and wider experience might be chosen

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at the primaries. It ventured to inquire if Jim Warren would retire in favor of such a man.

“Not in a thousand years!” declared Jim Warren. “I’m just beginning to enjoy this.”

CHAPTER VI

JIM WARREN SHUFFLES

WHILE the telegraph wires were singing with messages in code from the octopus to Lewis, and from Lewis to the octopus, there came two words from Franques to Lewis. They were:

“Come home!”

Lewis scented real danger; he came. The newspaper men met him at the railroad station with the amiable intention of pinning him against a wall and extracting from him an answer to that one vital question: “What about those letters?” Lewis smiled pleasantly and told them that his motoring trip had been a great success. “But the letters?” His car ran well—very well, indeed. “The letters?” He was pleased to say that he had found the roads

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in magnificent condition. "Letters?" The weather was ideal. Again he smiled pleasantly and climbed into a cab.

There was a perplexed wrinkle on Lewis' brow as he entered his apartments at the Hotel Stanton. Franques was waiting for him there. For the first time in his life Lewis was vaguely suspicious of this swarthy henchman of his. For ten years Franques had served him and he had come to rely upon him implicitly; for ten years Franques had been practically in charge of his affairs—even his private papers. He alone knew the combination of the safe where those papers were kept; he—

"Good evening, Mr. Lewis," Franques greeted.

"Where did Jim Warren get those letters?" Lewis queried. His eyes were steely, but there was no trace of anger in his voice; instead, he was fairly purring. Franques recognized it as his most dangerous mood. "Where did Jim Warren get those letters?"

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"If you'll step into this room?" Franques requested.

Lewis followed him in silence. With a wave of his hand Franques indicated the safe—a small, old-fashioned, unsubstantial affair. One stupefied glance and Lewis dropped down on his knees in front of it. The safe had been robbed! The lock had been cut away from the door, clean; the work had been done with a drill. There on his knees Lewis stared dumbly. Here was a possibility he had never foreseen. Some subtle change came over Franques' face; his wicked eyes lighted.

Finally Lewis rose and fell limply into a chair. Every record of all his multifarious political iniquities had been kept in that safe. If they had all fallen into the hands of another man—Jim Warren— His face went ashen at the thought, his jaws snapped, his fingers worked nervously; he suffered an odd sensation of choking.

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"Is anything else missing?" he demanded suddenly. The question came with an effort.

"Nothing is missing," Franques assured him unemotionally—"not even the letters." He produced them. "Evidently they were photographed and put back."

Lewis began to breathe again. For the second time he dropped on his knees and feverishly ransacked the safe.

"I think you'll find everything there," his henchman ventured. "I've looked through carefully."

But that was something Lewis could take no man's word for, not even Franques'. He removed everything to his desk, and for nearly an hour he sat there going through a litter of documents—for nearly an hour, and no word was spoken. At last he turned upon Franques.

"Why," he asked slowly—"Why should the man who robbed the safe photograph only those two letters when there are so many other things

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here that would have been of even greater value to him—to Jim Warren?”

“There is nothing to indicate that everything in the safe wasn’t photographed,” Franques pointed out quietly.

Realization of this possibility brought Lewis to his feet. He stood glaring at Franques, breathing heavily, his face gone haggard.

“He would have had plenty of time,” Franques went on to explain monotonously. “You’ve been away for two weeks, your apartments have been locked, and even the servants in the hotel didn’t enter your rooms in that time. I came here once a few days ago and put the two letters that have been published in the safe. One I got back from you; the other was returned by the interests according to your agreement. When they were printed I came again and found everything practically as you see it now. It’s clear, then, that if the safe-breaker had been able to gain admission in the interval between my visits he could have

JIM WARREN SHUFFLES

worked at his leisure. You'll notice he didn't blow open the safe. That would have attracted attention."

Lewis listened, speechless.

"If he did photograph everything in that safe," he broke out violently, "it means—" He stopped.

"It means you'll have hard sledding to get back to the legislature." Franques finished the sentence for him. "I am assuming, of course, that the other photographs will be given to the newspapers."

"It means more than that, Franques," Lewis declared slowly. "It means that, with all the power I've got in this state, we'll go to jail unless we can recover those photographs. There's no need of using pretty words! Jail for you and for me, do you understand?"

Franques shrugged his shoulders.

"Did you report the robbery to the police?"

"Report this robbery?" Franques seemed astonished. "You have just given the best reason

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in the world why I should not have reported it. I did not, of course."

"And what do you make of it? Who robbed the safe? Jim Warren?"

"Not Jim Warren, certainly," was the emphatic reply. "Evidently it is the work of an expert—"

"Hired by Jim Warren," Lewis interrupted. "And the newspapers—have they any more of the photographs?"

"I hardly think so. I have taken pains to make discreet inquiries and—"

"Then," Lewis declared sharply, "we've got to stop these photographs before they get to the newspapers."

"How?" Apparently Franques had no ideas of his own on the subject.

"Bluff Jim Warren to a standstill!" Lewis was floundering for a method; he offered the first possibility that came to hand: "Threaten his arrest for safe-robbery? Or forgery?" He stopped and stared at Franques keenly. "He

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forged those letters that have been printed. Understand?"

Franques shook his head.

"He'd laugh at you," he said.

"Get to the newspapers, then!" said Lewis desperately.

"You might stop a cyclone or a streak of lightning or an earthquake, but you couldn't stop a newspaper," Franques remarked succinctly. "Besides, all the newspapers here are after your hide now."

Lewis' eyes narrowed to mere pin-points. Fire must be fought with fire.

"There's always one way," he said meaningly. "A clever, bold man could unlock a door or break open a window; or, if necessary, blow a safe—"

Franques regarded him steadily for a long time. Finally Lewis looked away.

"I understand; but it's dangerous."

"Dangerous!" Lewis flamed suddenly. "Do you think that either you or I could live on the

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edge of this volcano? I know it's dangerous; I'll pay for the danger and I won't ask any questions." His hands shook a little; he shuddered. "Get 'em—you know what I mean; and do it at once—to-night if possible."

"I think I know a man—" Franques began.

"Don't tell me anything about it; I don't want to know," Lewis interrupted. "Get those photographs—I don't care how!"

CHAPTER VII

THE TIMID BURGLAR

THREE or four times Jim Warren paused in his writing to glance impatiently at his watch. Midnight had come and gone and the roar of the restless city had sunk to a droning; one o'clock and the droning merged into the sheer silence of night, unbroken save for the sporadic clanging of a street-car in some nearby thoroughfare. At twenty minutes past one Jim Warren, listening keenly, caught the sound of stealthy footsteps in the hall. He grinned expectantly and, leaning forward, pressed the button which shut off the electric lights. Then he sat still in the darkness, waiting.

The footsteps moved along the hall with a peculiar hissing noiselessness on the carpet; now they were just outside his door. Then,

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for a minute, perhaps, all sounds ceased. At last there came a slight click as a cautious hand tried the knob. By an almost imperceptible movement of the air and a gentle bulging of the window curtains, Jim Warren knew that the door had been opened. Ten seconds and the curtains hung limp again. His visitor, whoever and whatever he might be, had entered and closed the door behind him without so much as one squeak. Jim Warren sat staring through the darkness in the direction of the door.

Suddenly the slide of a dark lantern was pushed aside and there came a circular swoop of light, directed first at his bed, which had not been disturbed. It lingered there for an instant, then it was turned full in his face. He blinked in the glare of it, but he didn't move.

"You did that very well," he remarked quietly. "That door always squeaks when I open it."

There was a pause; and finally from out of

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the pall of darkness behind the light, in a pleasant sort of voice :

"This is Mr. Warren, I presume?"

"Yes."

Jim Warren leaned forward and pushed the electric button ; the lights leaped into life again. It was a sinister figure he saw—a man with the upper part of his face obscured by a mask and the lower part wrapped about with a heavy muffler. The black slouch hat of melodrama was pulled down over his eyes and in his right hand he carried a revolver. The two men regarded each other in silence. Then :

"I am the burglar, sir," said the intruder.

"So I see," said Jim Warren. "Glad to see you. Won't you—er—won't you sit down and have off your mask?"

"Thank you, sir." The burglar came forward and dropped wearily into a chair. "I had expected to find you in bed, sir." It was a complaint.

"I'm sorry," Jim Warren apologized. "I

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hope I haven't put you to any inconvenience; but I had some letters to write, and—"

"I don't suppose it really matters." The burglar spoke in a tone of deep resignation. "Nothing ever happens as we'd have it, sir."

The burglar laid his hat and revolver on the table and untied the cord which held his mask in place. He was rather prepossessing in appearance, with the soft eyes of a woman and a weak, indolent mouth. He drew a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his forehead.

"It's rather warm to-night, sir," he observed.

"It is; yes," Jim Warren agreed. "Can I offer you a—a glass of water?"

"If it wouldn't trouble you too much, sir."

Jim Warren rose and poured it, then stood by looking down upon the burglar as he drank.

"And a cigar?"

"Thank you, sir. I never smoke. I have no bad habits."

Jim Warren took the glass and set it down beside the water pitcher.

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"Are you a professional?" he asked courteously. "Or is this merely an extraordinary enterprise?"

"It's my regular business, sir. I used to sing tenor for a living, but my voice failed and I had no business training, so I adopted this profession. I'm not very strong and manual labor was out of the question; so—" He waved his hands. "One must do something, sir."

"Yes, one must do something," Jim Warren assented. "Why not this? After all, it requires only a little nerve."

"Not even that, sir, if one is careful," the burglar explained. "As a matter of fact, I am quite a coward. I quit this business entirely at one time because of a—of a— Well, a policeman shot at me and it quite upset me. I remained out of employment for six months, and only went back to this because my wife and children were in want. I couldn't bear to see them suffer, sir. Since then I've done rather well. I manage to keep my eldest boy in board-

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ing school, and I've bought and almost paid for a little home in the suburbs, with a charming garden attached."

Jim Warren had been half smiling as he listened. He picked up the revolver and was examining it.

"A little job of safe-drilling in a hotel comes in the course of your duties at times, I dare say?" he asked carelessly.

"You know of that, then, sir?" inquired the burglar. "It took me two days to do that job. It's out of my line, but I did it rather well."

Jim Warren nodded as if some question in his own mind had been answered.

"Perhaps a little photography, too?"

"Yes, sir. I made all those photographs, under the direction of Mr.—"

"Never mind," Jim Warren interrupted. Then he came down to the matter in hand. "Now that you are here, what is the next step?"

"You must capture me, sir. There'll have to

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be a desperate struggle, of course; then you must bind me hard and fast." He unbuttoned his coat and began to reel off yards of rope. "I was afraid you wouldn't have any rope handy, sir; so I brought this along with me."

Jim Warren laughed, deep-throated. The burglar turned his mild eyes upon him inquiringly.

"If you'll permit me," he suggested, "I think I can give the room the appearance of having been upset by a struggle without putting you to the inconvenience of going through it, sir. Let's see! You were sitting at the table writing when I came in. I crept up and leaped upon you from behind. You might upset the ink on the table. That would be rather an artistic touch. And your chair, of course, would be turned over. Then you'll have to muss up your hair, sir. I'll tear my mask across, like this! There! Now I think that will be all, sir, if you will bind me."

Right sturdily did Jim Warren bind him,

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with his feet drawn together and wrapped in coils of the rope and his hands behind him, knotted securely. Then he picked him up in his sinewy arms and laid him on the bed.

"Is that all right?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, I think that will do very nicely. If you'll just fling my hat down on the floor and trample on it and then muss up my hair? Thanks. I think everything is quite convincing now."

"But the revolver?" Jim Warren held it in his hand.

"You'd better take it along, sir," the burglar advised. "It's quite safe. It has only wax bullets in it." He blushed. "It quite unnerves me to think of loading it with real bullets."

"But suppose," Jim Warren queried—"suppose there should come a time when you needed a real bullet?"

"I should let myself be taken, sir, if that's what you mean. I couldn't—I wouldn't hurt any one; and if I am hurt"—he shrugged his

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shoulders—"or killed, I carry very heavy life and accident insurance, sir."

Jim Warren didn't comment upon the fact that insurance would be invalid if the burglar should be killed or wounded in the practice of his profession; he couldn't bring himself to cast a shadow of anxiety over this gentle soul. He stared at him a minute and went out.

Ten minutes later Francis Everard Lewis was aroused from an uneasy sleep by the ringing of his telephone bell. The sharp clatter of it sent a nervous thrill through him. Franques, of course! Had he succeeded?

"Hello!" he called.

"Hello," came the reply in a voice he had never heard before. "This Mr. Lewis?"

"Yes."

"This is Jim Warren," came over the wire. "I have one of your voters locked up in my room. I thought perhaps you'd like to come down and talk it over with me."

"One of my—what?" Lewis demanded.

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"One of your voters," said Jim Warren. "He's a burglar. He tells me he came to steal some photographs which happen to be in my possession. I captured him. Will you come down and see him?"

"Come down and see him? A burglar! I don't know what you are talking about. Of course I won't come."

"Very well, then. I'll turn him over to the police. Good night."

"Wait a minute!" The request came as if torn from Lewis' throat. "I—I don't know anything about any—any burglar. I think—perhaps—I do know about the—the photographs. I—er—I—"

"Yes, I think perhaps you do," said Jim Warren. He was grinning into the transmitter. "Those photographs have a price, you know?"

"A price!" Lewis' teeth snapped. Why hadn't he thought of that before! "And what is that price?"

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"Your withdrawal and the indorsement of Jim Warren, labor candidate, by your machine."

The sheer audacity of the suggestion left Lewis dumb for an instant. When words came at last it was a spluttering that was incoherent over the wire.

"What is it, please?" Jim Warren mocked.

"No!" thundered Lewis.

"Very well," said Jim Warren. "I'll turn the burglar over to the police. Good night."

There was a clatter as he hung the receiver on the hook. . . . Five minutes later Jim Warren reëntered his room.

"Didn't hook him that time," he explained in answer to the look of inquiry on the burglar's face. "However, I'll bet eight dollars he spends the most uncomfortable night of his life." He leaned over and unfastened the knots which bound the burglar. "Better run along to your wife and kiddies," he advised. "They'll be worrying about you."

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The burglar rose and stretched himself.

"I'm sorry, sir, that all our trouble came to nothing," he apologized. "Good night, sir."

And he went stealthily as he came.

CHAPTER VIII

MARKING THE CARDS

IN the aerie height of an office which overlooked the whole city of New York, Mr. Pointer sat, a shriveled wisp of a man, and—like Teufelsdröckh—peered down “into all that wasp-nest or beehive, and witnessed their wax-laying and honey-making and poison-brewing, and choking by sulphur. . . . The joyful and the sorrowful are there; men are dying there; men are being born; men are praying. . . . Councilors of state sit plotting and playing their high chess game, whereof the pawns are men.” Mr. Pointer rasped his skinny hands together and cackled dryly. “—whereof the pawns are men!” The phrase pleased him; he played the game himself rather adroitly.

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Mr. Pointer was one of the many tentacles of the octopus; a clearing house of political information and adviser-in-chief of a host of men who guarded the political interests of certain gigantic corporations. He was the one man who knew precisely why Governor Blank was not made United States Senator from the state of So-and-So; and why Dash wasn't returned to the city council from a certain district in the city of This-and-That; and why the mayor of You-Know vetoed bill No. 18, which was an act to repeal an act, et cetera. He knew these things because it was his business to know them—and the octopus paid him well.

It was to him that Francis Everard Lewis came, panic-stricken. Under the glittering eyes of this shriveled little man he told his story, all of it, from Jim Warren's announcement of his candidacy up to and including the incident of the captured burglar, who had been sent by Franques to recover the photographs. He remembered with abject horror the weary hours

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following that conversation over the telephone. Jim Warren had said he would turn the burglar over to the police; if he had— But he hadn't; he had released him. What motive lay back of that he didn't know, unless, perhaps, it was Jim Warren's desire to keep himself out of a possible controversy as to the breaking open of a certain safe.

"Why were you keeping all your letters and ours?" Mr. Pointer queried curtly. "What was the use of it?"

"I thought perhaps they might be of value at some time," Lewis replied haltingly.

"Of value in case we ever decided to throw you down?" queried the little man. "Is that right? It was a club over our heads?"

"I don't know why I kept them," Lewis said desperately. "Certainly I didn't want them to get into the hands of any one else."

"I understand," said Mr. Pointer testily. "The same scheme has been tried before. It never works." He paused and stroked his

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withered chin. "Just when was it your—your man tried to recover the letters?"

"Night before last."

"Nothing has appeared since?"

"Not yet; but Jim Warren's got them all. He practically admitted as much over the 'phone to me."

"And now, what do you purpose doing?"

"I don't know; that's why I am here. What can I do?"

"There are several things you can do," said Mr. Pointer.

He turned to the window and stood staring down upon the placid bosom of the Hudson for a minute or more. A giant steamship swashed and wallowed her way toward the open sea; mosquito-like tugs darted hither and thither; cumbersome ferryboats toiled along endlessly.

"There seem to be some very good reasons why Jim Warren will not proceed to extremes in the use of those letters—unless he has to,"

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he remarked finally. "You say he has demanded your withdrawal and the indorsement of your machine as the price of the photographs?"

"Yes."

Again Mr. Pointer was silent for a minute or more.

"Why don't you withdraw?" he asked casually.

"Withdraw!" Lewis repeated incredulously.

"Give up all—"

"Withdraw," Mr. Pointer echoed crabbedly, "and name some other man who would have a chance to beat Jim Warren. It would be a voluntary act and would shut off the letters. If Jim Warren beats your man it is no reflection upon you; if your man wins you can throw him out after one term. By that time Jim Warren will be tame enough, I dare say."

"I won't do it!" Lewis declared hotly. Reason was not there; it was only anger against Jim Warren. "I won't do it," he repeated.

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Mr. Pointer squinted out of half-closed eyes at his visitor for an instant, then shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, if you're going to stick, go at him systematically," he advised in a different tone. "Block him in the caucuses. You can do that?"

"Yes; not only in my machine but in Simmonds'," said Lewis. "But he's announced that he would ask no favor of any caucus."

"He might. You can do the same thing in the primaries? Choke him off?"

"Yes."

"Can you keep his name off the ballots?"

"I can. Two of the Commissioners of Election belong to me."

"Then, go to Simmonds and make a deal. Give Simmonds the mayor in return for his machine's support of you for the legislature."

"I'd thought of that and felt out Simmonds on it. He's willing."

Then for a long time there was silence be-

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tween the two men. Mr. Pointer, his small, shriveled face drawn into a thousand wrinkles, merely looked at this man. He knew the type—the sordid soul of him, the selfishness, the greed and the cunning boldness which would lead him to any length.

“All these suggestions, of course, are based on the idea that you’ll have to fight it out,” he said finally. “But there comes to me another scheme which might end the fight in your favor immediately.”

“What is it?” Lewis’ drawn face lighted eagerly.

“It’s true, isn’t it, that, to win, Jim Warren must have the support of your machine?” Mr. Pointer asked in turn. “And he knows that, doesn’t he?”

“Generally speaking, that’s true; yes. Why?”

“Every man has his price, you know.” The shriveled little man’s thin lips were drawn into a sneer. “Find Jim Warren’s price. Offer

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him a commissionership, or something of the sort, if he will quit in your favor."

Lewis sat up straight in his chair.

"By George, I hadn't thought of that!" he exclaimed.

"You don't have to give it to him, you know," the elder man pointed out. "You can always double-cross him."

Lewis rose excitedly and paced the length of the room half a dozen times, his face aglow, his fingers working exultantly.

"I think he'd fall for that," he declared. "Of course, I don't have to give it to him. Why—" And he laughed. "I think that's the answer."

There was nothing of this relief visible upon the wrinkled face of the little man; instead, he sat perfectly still, watching Lewis.

"It will be a condition of that agreement, of course," he said, "that the photographs and plates are to be returned to you; and when you get them they are to be returned to me!"

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He laughed oddly. "Meanwhile you will return to me all the original letters I have ever written to you. I'll just trim your claws."

Lewis shot him a quick, curious glance. He understood perfectly.

"One other thing, Lewis," the little man went on implacably. "If this Jim Warren person does beat you, in spite of all this, of how much use will you be to us afterward?"

"As much use as ever I was," Lewis replied positively. "Of more use, perhaps."

"You'll be discredited to a certain extent, of course, and—"

"But," Lewis put in sharply, "Dwight Tillinghast is my man. I put him in there; I made him and I'm going to make him governor. Neither Jim Warren nor any other man can stop me from doing that."

"You are sure of him?"

"Sure of him?" Lewis repeated. "Absolutely. I am going to marry his daughter Edna. Every man has his price, as you say."

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That's my price. She's worth a million or so in her own right!"

On the afternoon of the following day Franques called upon Jim Warren and they were closeted together for half an hour. Curiously enough, half a dozen newspaper men, brought there by some inspiration, were waiting outside when Jim Warren ushered Franques through the door.

"Tell Francis Everard Lewis," said Jim Warren distinctly, heedless of listening ears, "that he can't buy me. I've got his number—and it's twenty-three!"

CHAPTER IX

JIM WARREN TURNS A TRICK

THERE was no particular mystery to Lewis in Jim Warren's refusal of a five-thousand-dollar-a-year commissionership — simply, it wasn't enough. He hadn't given Franques sufficient authority. The only thing to do, he finally saw, would be to call upon this Jim Warren person himself and adjust matters. Buying him off, of course, was the feasible thing. He would go and do it. No; on second thoughts he would make Jim Warren come to him. To this end he despatched a courteous little note to Jim Warren asking him to drop by the Hotel Stanton at his early convenience to talk things over.

"If you want to see me you know where my office is," Jim Warren answered curtly. "If you come, come alone after six o'clock."

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"If you come, come alone!" Lewis found a grain of comfort in that ambiguous sentence. Of course, it meant that Jim Warren was amenable to reason if reason took a substantial form. The finality of the note he construed as merely an outcropping of the egotism which had come to Jim Warren with his first feeling of power. So he pocketed his pride and called—alone—after six o'clock. Jim Warren grinned when he came in, and shook the proffered hand without hesitation.

Lewis purred a few preliminaries while he studied the freckled face, the lean jaw, the whimsical sky-blue eyes. He felt himself to be a keen judge of men, did Lewis; and instantly he isolated and classified to his own satisfaction those qualities that drew men to Jim Warren and made them believe in him. Confidently he came down to the matter in hand.

"It's unfortunate, Mr. Warren," he began suavely, "that we never met before you—er—

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before you became a candidate for the legislature. I'm sure if we had met it would never have happened that we would have been opposed politically."

For several reasons Jim Warren didn't mention the fact that he had called upon him in the beginning and didn't find him; instead, he fussed around his desk for a box of cigars. Casually, quite casually, his finger touched an electric button hidden under a pile of newspapers. Lewis accepted and lighted a cigar.

"You want me to quit?" Jim Warren inquired pointedly.

Lewis waved his hands deprecatingly.

"Well, it's unfortunate that we should be opposed," he temporized. "Matters might have been adjusted in another way if I had only understood. Now, if you had proceeded in the regular way—"

"Now, Lewis, let's cut out the blab," Jim Warren interrupted curtly. "How much is it worth to me to quit?"

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There is nothing so disconcerting to a diplomatist as utter frankness. For a minute Lewis stared at Jim Warren, then the whole expression of his face changed; his lips curled into an exquisitely courteous smile which nevertheless was a sneer. He glanced cautiously about the room.

"Speak your piece," Jim Warren directed. "There is no one to hear but me; not a soul in the building but us."

"I think it's possible for us to get together, Mr. Warren," Lewis said slowly after a moment. "You've met me frankly; we'll get along."

"How much is it worth to me to quit?" reiterated Jim Warren.

"How much is it worth?" Lewis reflected. "Well, you declined the offer of a commissionership at five thousand a year, made through Franques; so—"

"Talk business," said Jim Warren impatiently. "That was merely a sop and you

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would probably have double-crossed me. How much real money is it worth to me to quit?"

Lewis smiled blandly. The difficulties he had anticipated were thinning out, vanishing.

"On a cash basis?" he queried.

"On a cash basis. Make your proposition."

"Ten thousand dollars?"—tentatively.

"Not enough. Come again."

Lewis was still smiling. Jim Warren's withdrawal at any price within reason would be cheap, both to himself and the interests he represented. This year was to bring the harvest of many schemes that had been under way for months. With Dwight Tillinghast as speaker, and with himself on three or four choice committees, there was no end to possibilities.

"Twenty thousand?" he suggested briskly; and he rubbed his well-manicured hands together ingratiatingly. "That is to be paid on condition that you get out and stay out; and that you return to me all plates and all photographs of the various papers in my safe.

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Twenty thousand dollars is real money, as you call it."

Jim Warren's sky-blue eyes were fixed intently upon Lewis' eyes. After a while he drew a long breath and grinned cheerfully.

"Those photographs seem to stick in your craw," he remarked pleasantly. "I believe we had a short conversation about them one night over the telephone, didn't we?"

Lewis chose to ignore the question.

"Does twenty thousand go?" he asked.

"Oh, why not make it twenty-five?"

"Twenty-five it is, then," Lewis exclaimed; and he banged the desk with quick impatience. The price was stiff, but it meant his political life and he was in no position to haggle. "That offer, of course, carries the conditions I have named."

"And when—when do I get it?"

"The day you announce in the newspapers over your signature that you have withdrawn—the details can be arranged to suit you,"

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Lewis explained; "and you'll return the plates and photographs."

"How do I know I'll get it?" Jim Warren stared at him. "Even then?" he added.

"Ask any man I've ever dealt with. He'll tell you I never break my word."

"Who, for instance?" Jim Warren went on naively. "What reference can you give? What public man have you done business with?"

"All this is absurd," Lewis declared. "Does twenty-five thousand go?"

Jim Warren arose and lazily stretched his sinewy arms. Half gaping he stood at the window looking out upon the iron yard. 'Twas there that his fight had begun; 'twas there that he'd given his pledge to the boys. Finally he turned back upon his caller.

"Lewis, I haven't started on you yet," he said quietly. "When I do I won't leave a whole bone in your body." He thrust a calloused finger into the boss's face. "I'm going

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to make you quit—believe me; I'm going to make it so hot for you you'll be glad to quit!" His voice had risen as he talked, his freckled face glowed with anger, the sky-blue eyes flamed. "Now, get out of here; quick—quick! I can't keep my hands off you!"

Lewis, vastly astonished, but calm, rose.

"So you were playing a game, eh?" he sneered. "It's just as well; so was I." Suddenly his self-possession deserted him, the polish sloughed off and he raged at the trick that had been played upon him; but his voice was cold, level, merciless: "My grip in this state extends further back, Warren, than you can believe. I'm going to have you arrested for safe robbery and you'll never have a chance. Damn you! I'll railroad you!"

Staring straight into Lewis' face, Jim Warren laughed.

"By withdrawing now, Lewis, you can save your face!"

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"Withdrawing?" The word came explosively. "I'll—I'll—"

"You have just placed in my hands the weapon with which I'll compel you to withdraw," Jim Warren continued. "There's no hurry about it, though. The election is a long time off, so I am going to give you a whole week to think about withdrawing and get used to the idea. I have the weapon. If, at the end of a week, you don't withdraw I'll use it!"

Lewis glanced about the room, dazed with a sudden fear. What weapon? Had their conversation been overheard?

"You mean some one has been listening to us?" he demanded thickly.

"There's not a soul in the building, Lewis!" Again Jim Warren laughed.

"I'll railroad you!" Lewis shouted, crazed by uncontrollable anger against this man. "I'll railroad you for safe robbery!"

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“Go ahead,” Jim Warren urged. “Have me arrested. I’ll wait here until the police come. Or”—he added insolently—“or shall I go along with you now to the police station?”

CHAPTER X

CAPRICIOUS FATE

FATE arranges the affairs of this world according to her own caprice. So strangely does she work that one may have to travel around the world to shake hands with the man who lives next door. It was Fate—the kindest one in the calendar—who took charge of Jim Warren on the following Sunday. He had stopped in at the factory for a little while and then, lured into the open by the zippy, nippy air of fall, had boarded a trolley car and ridden to the end of the line, some dozen or fifteen miles from Warburton. Crimson forests and golden hedges had beckoned him on even then; he strode straight through the little village, up the hill on the other side and looked down into the rainbow valley beyond. The

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ribbonlike road curved seductively a thousand feet farther on. He would go that far, anyway, just to see what might lie around the bend.

He paused to cut a slender switch and, snapping it against his leg rhythmically, went on, inhaling deep breaths of the scented air. He was very well satisfied with himself, was Jim Warren, on this particular morning. Things were going well with him and, above all, the big idea was coming through! Any doubt that might ever have existed in his mind as to this was gone now. At the proper time and in the proper way he would make Lewis quit if he hadn't already quit of his own volition; and then— He fell to building air-castles. He would be governor, of course—that was the natural sequence of his play—and after that anything he liked. Governor Warren! United States Senator Warren! He grinned.

Just before he rounded the bend he caught the steady "tap-tap-tap" of—what? A wood-

CAPRICIOUS FATE

pecker? No; it was a more metallic sound than that. He strode on; then he saw. Directly ahead of him, in the dip of the valley, an automobile was standing beside the road—a long, low, rakish-looking craft, creamy white, with tan trimmings. The daintiness of its color scheme contrasted strangely with the lusty look of the brute, high of wheel and massive of axle. “Tap-tap-tap,” came from underneath the car.

As he drew nearer silently through the dust, Jim Warren paused uncertainly for an instant. On one side of the car, from underneath, protruded a pair of feet—silly little feet they were, incased in absurdly sturdy boots, laced high about the ankles. By George, a woman! She had spread her blankets on the ground and, lying flat on her back, was at work underneath the car. Apparently she paid not the slightest attention to him as he approached; as a matter of fact, she didn't hear him. “Tap-tap-tap,” said the hammer.

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"Hello, under there!" Jim Warren called.
"Can I help?"

The feet vanished in a swirl of skirts, some one exclaimed, "Goodness!" in a startled tone and a girl scrambled out from beneath the car. Her hair was disheveled and strands of it were stringing down over her face, scarlet from exertion. Across an alabaster brow was a streak of grease; her gloved hands were smeared with it. So was the hammer she held in one of them.

For an instant the girl stared up into his face with questioning eyes. Then she smiled.

"Good morning. Is it you?"

"Good morning. It is."

She glanced around inquiringly.

"Where did you come from? How did you get here?"

"Nowhere; walked," replied Jim Warren.
"Can I help?"

The girl pushed the hair back from her face with a greasy glove.

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"We always seem to meet at critical moments, don't we?" she queried. "The last time you rescued my glove from a dog; this time—" She laughed. "Do you know anything about automobiles?"

"Not a thing in the world, but I can help," said Jim Warren. "Are you way out here all alone, with that big—big thing?" The tremendous size of the car rose up and smote him in the eye. A girl alone in the wilderness with a locomotive like that!

"All alone," she said. "It's a new car and I was trying it out."

He dropped on the ground beside her and peered underneath the car. A perfect mess of joints and bolts and levers and rods and nuts—a million of them, more or less. It made his head swim.

"And what, may I ask, is the matter?"

"I snapped off the pin in my first universal joint," she explained, "and the flanges are bent so I can't drive it out."

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He looked at her blankly.

"You don't say!" he commented. "Where is it? Perhaps I can drive it out." He started to crawl underneath.

"But you don't know anything about automobiles," she expostulated.

"But I do know something about machinery," he informed her; "and a universal joint is a universal joint in any language." Again he started to crawl underneath.

"Take off your coat and roll up your sleeves, then," she commanded. "You can't wear clothes under an automobile—that is, if you ever want to wear them again."

He obeyed orders, baring two sinewy forearms that she had only to look at to know that her troubles were over. They put their heads together under the car and she explained the trouble in detail. He knew precisely what was the matter, but he liked to hear her talk.

"And now," he said at the end, "a monkey-wrench."

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She handed him one, some five or six inches long. He glanced at it, mentally compared it with the great piece of solid steel to be twisted back into shape and grinned.

"My dear madam, you couldn't set a watch with that," he said. "I mean a monkey-wrench!"

"I have another, so large I can hardly lift it," she explained. "I call it grandpa for short."

She fumbled in the tool-box and produced it—a two-foot wrench that would fit into a man's hands, with jaws on it like the maw of Doom. He fitted it to the twisted flange.

"The car won't move?" he asked.

"No. The brake's on."

"Get back a little, please. If this should slip it would kill you."

There are ways and ways of bending steel: one the quick, violent way, which will snap it off like glass; another, a slower, steadier way, by which it can be eased back into position. Jim Warren knew his metal. Slowly but surely

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the sinews in his lean arms flexed, grew taut and the massive body of the car creaked on its springs. It was muscle against steel. The girl, fascinated by the tremendous power of the shoulders and arms, the inflexibility of inexorable steel, suddenly felt very weak and puny. She had tried to turn that with a small wrench! Might as well have used a hat-pin.

"It's moving," said Jim Warren, without so much as a puff; then after a moment: "There; I think we can drive out the broken pin now. Have you an extra one?"

The broken pin fell out as he spoke; it was five minutes' work to put in a new one; then they both crawled out from under the car and sat on the ground looking at each other.

"I don't know how I'll ever be able to thank you," said the girl. "I can't imagine what I would have done if you hadn't come along. I've been here more than an hour."

Jim Warren cleaned his hands on a piece of waste.

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"Do you know," he remarked irrelevantly, "I have the strangest impression of having met you somewhere before?"

"That day in the bank, of course."

"Before that," he corrected. "I wonder where it could have been?"

"I wonder!" She was bending over the toolbox, replacing "grandpa." There was a queer, introspective light in her limpid eyes. "I had that impression the first time I saw you," she went on. "It must have been because I had seen your picture in the newspapers. I know who you are, of course," she added hastily.

"You do?" Jim Warren asked almost eagerly. "I am at a disadvantage, then. I don't know who—"

"You are Mr. Jim Warren, of Warburton, and you are running against Mr. Lewis for the legislature!" There was mockery in her eyes.

"I am; and further I shall have the satisfaction of beating him—believe me," said Jim Warren.

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The girl laughed lightly and shook her head.

"It's been tried before."

"I know; but I've got his number."

The girl leaned forward and pressed a button. The engine crackled and roared, then settled down to a quiet purring.

"If you do beat him," she taunted, "it may be that you and I will meet again. I live in Sandringham, the capital, you know. If you don't beat him we probably will not meet again." She offered a slim, bare hand; Jim Warren took it. "If you do beat him I shan't like you in spite of all you've done for me; if you don't I will. Good-by. I'm more than an hour late and Sandringham is twenty-five miles away."

She leaped lightly into the car, pushed one lever, pulled another—and the car moved.

"*Au revoir!*" she said.

Jim Warren stood looking after her until the car swung over a hill in the distance and van-

CAPRICIOUS FATE

ished below it. Turning, he strode back up the hill toward the trolley line.

"I wonder who she is!" He asked the question a dozen times. An hour later it occurred to him that, had he taken the trouble to notice the number of the car and inquired at the first police station, that question, in all probability, would have been answered.

CHAPTER XI

JIM WARREN RAISES

WITH his gaze immovably fixed upon some trivial ornament of his desk, his mouth set, his hands clenched, Lewis was giving orders sharply through closed teeth. Franques was jotting them down in notes on the back of an old envelope. There was an air of humility about Franques, an oily deference in his tone, an obsequiousness in his manner, which were belied by the evil glitter of his beady eyes and the sardonic twist of his thin lips. It was all lost upon Lewis. For him there remained only one thought, one idea in the world—to crush Jim Warren. He'd given him, Lewis, a week to get used to the idea of withdrawing! An ultimatum! It was a bluff, of course! Nobody had heard their conversation, therefore— A bluff—and a crude one.

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"See Big Tom Simmonds this morning," Lewis was saying, "and tell him I want Jim Warren's name kept out of the caucus of his machine at any cost."

"Yes, sir," said Franques.

"Tell him, further, that Jim Warren must not be so much as mentioned in the primaries. I'll look after my end; I'll expect him to look after his."

"Yes, sir."

"Tell him, also, that under these conditions the deal I talked over with him the other day is on, if he's willing—that is, he is to have the mayor and council in return for his machine's support of me against Warren."

Franques looked up in surprise.

"That's a fat price you're paying," he ventured.

"No comments," Lewis snarled. "Do as I say."

"Yes, sir." Franques' lips turned up slightly at the corners. "That all?"

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"That's all."

There was joy around Big Tom Simmonds' throne when Franques brought the glad tidings. It had been something like four years since Big Tom had been compelled to loosen his grip on Warburton's throat—four lean, hungry years—and his fingers were itching.

"Tell Lewis he's on," was his characteristic reply. "My machine would nominate the devil himself in caucus if I knew we could put over the mayor and council!"

Lewis received the answer in silence, then sat down to wait. It was Jim Warren's move. What would it be? The production of more photographs? He shuddered at the thought. Day after day passed and no more photographs appeared. Slowly but surely a nervous elation took possession of Lewis. Of course no more photographs appeared, for the simple reason that Jim Warren had no more! After all it had only been an assumption of Franques' that all the papers in the safe had been copied. The

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conjecture soothed him; confidence came back. Of course he'd beat Jim Warren. Two or three newspapers and half a dozen labor organizations had declared for him, but even at that he'd beat him with Simmonds' support.

He put a question to Franques one day, the answer still further restored his belief in the future.

"Why is Jim Warren holding off?"

"To a man up a tree it would seem he's holding off because he has no more photographs," Franques replied, with a shrug of his dusty shoulders. "Of course there may be other reasons, but that is the obvious answer."

"I suppose there's no earthly way to get hold of them if he has?"—tentatively.

"I'd be afraid to try again—he'd shoot the next man," Franques declared. "Besides, if he has no more, what's the use?"

The week passed, and Jim Warren had failed to make good on his ultimatum. Lewis laughed outright with relief and from that moment be-

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gan his big planning for the fight that was to come. While Jim Warren was around talking from the tail of a tip-cart to the men who toiled he would open his campaign with a rally that would smother all that had gone before or would come after. He'd bring Lieutenant-Governor Hope and United States Senator Fynes and Speaker Tillinghast down to Warburton from the capital and smash Jim Warren once for all! Meanwhile, some night, he'd run around in his automobile and—unobserved himself—look over this crowd of Jim Warren's. It might be interesting.

It was a night or so later that Jim Warren took a running jump through Lewis' dream, like a circus performer through a paper hoop. He laid aside the popgun with which he had been campaigning and unmasked his thirteen-inch battery. Lewis and his henchman, Franques, tucked away behind the closely drawn curtains of an automobile standing near, were there and heard it.

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"Boys," Jim Warren began, with that quiz-zical grin of his, "it's all over but the shouting. To-morrow Francis Everard Lewis is going to withdraw in my favor. At the caucus of his machine next week Francis Everard Lewis, in person, will present my name and make me the candidate of his party instead of himself. He doesn't know it yet, but he'll do it."

"Is this man an idiot?" Lewis growled.

Franques didn't say.

"With you fellows and the indorsement of his machine no earthly power can stop me; and his machine will indorse me, whether he likes it or not—it will indorse me because Francis Everard Lewis is its boss and he'll tell it to."

Whereupon, quietly and succinctly, Jim Warren detailed the conditions of the deal by which Simmonds was to have the mayor and council in return for his support of Lewis for the legislature. Lewis squirmed uneasily. There hadn't been a hint of this in the public prints. How did Jim Warren know it?

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"You can search me!" Franques answered.

Following this Jim Warren commented at some length upon that splendid economy by which Lewis, in ten years, had saved enough out of his salary of eight hundred dollars a year to build ten tenement houses and still have money in bank.

"Of course," Jim Warren grinned, "it might not have been merely economy. It is barely possible that this affidavit may have some bearing."

From his pocket he produced a bank record, with an affidavit attached, showing that the octopus had once loaned a trifling sum of fifty thousand dollars to Lewis on an unindorsed demand note that bore on its face the magical words: "No protest and no interest." That note, dated four years before, had been charged off against the account of the octopus. Lewis swayed, felt himself slipping, and seized Franques' arm with damp, chilled fingers. Franques looked at him and was silent.

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"Oh, you Jim Warren!" came out of the crowd in the voice of old Bob Allaire. "Go to him, boy!"

Jim Warren laughed and produced from a suit-case on the tip-cart behind him a phonograph, which, in the thunderous clamor following upon his last statement, he deliberately adjusted and set up on a box. Lewis stared, stared with his eyes almost bursting from his head. Jim Warren turned to the throng, with one hand upon the lever of the phonograph; the flambeaux lighted his face, tensely earnest now.

"Here is why Francis Everard Lewis is going to quit," he screamed suddenly. "Listen to the manner of man he is! Judge him by his own words! The first voice is mine."

"You want me to quit?" grated the machine. That was Jim Warren.

"Now, Lewis!" Jim Warren shouted.

"Well, it's unfortunate that we should be opposed," came from the phonograph in Lewis'

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smooth, suave voice. "Matters might have been adjusted in another way if I had only understood. Now, if you had proceeded in the regular way—"

White as chalk, with strange lines veined across his face, Lewis leaned forward and spoke to the chauffeur. The car sped away.

There was dead silence in the crowd save for the light whir of the phonograph and the thin piping voices that were born of it—dead silence to the end of that interview in Jim Warren's private office, and then—chaos! Upon the shoulders of his fellows Jim Warren was hoisted and borne through the streets. The surging mob halted traffic, jeered at the staying hands of the police, hooted Lewis and raised the name of Jim Warren to the skies.

From a darkened window of his apartments in the Hotel Stanton, Lewis looked down upon the crowd in the street and knew that the end had come. His power was broken; he was being butchered to make a Roman holiday—this

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red-headed Warren person was an idol; he had beaten him, Lewis, at his own game—trickery! He wondered if he would go further! If he might, perchance, in the first flush of exultation, proceed to criminal prosecution! He shuddered!

There came a knock at the door. Lewis whirled with a poignant apprehension of danger. Perhaps the police were there now! His teeth snapped; he opened the door. Some newspaper men wanted to see him. The door crashed in their faces. . . . After a while he thought of Edna. She must not know! . . . He called Tillinghast on the long distance.

“For the love of God don’t let Edna see tomorrow’s newspapers!” he pleaded over the wire.

“What’s the matter?” asked Tillinghast, bewildered. “What’s happened?”

“Don’t let her see them—you’ll know why when you see them!”

Next morning Franques, meek, unemotional,

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brought in the newspapers and the early morning mail.

"Come back at noon," Lewis directed.

"Yes, sir."

Franques vanished as silently as he had come. Lewis opened the newspapers with unsteady hands. There it was! He read it without comment. . . . There was some mail, too. One envelope bore the mark of the Atlas Plow Works. He opened it:

"Will it be necessary for me to go further? Will you quit? Will your machine indorse me? Or shall I proceed to criminal prosecution?"

"JAMES PALMER WARREN."

CHAPTER XII

THE HIGH HAND WINS

DWIGHT TILLINGHAST raised his eyes to those of his daughter, across the breakfast table.

"I heard from Lewis last night just before twelve," he remarked.

"Yes?"—eagerly.

"He called me up by long distance to ask me to ask you not to read to-day's newspapers."

Edna arched her brows in perplexity, and held her coffee-cup suspended in midair.

"Why not?" she queried.

"Because"—Tillinghast paused to clear his throat—"because—well, there are many things in politics you would not understand, my dear. Last night, for instance, a very bitter and very

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violent attack was made upon Lewis by this Jim Warren person in Warburton."

Edna flushed a little, finished pouring the coffee and put down the pot.

"Why shouldn't I read it?" she asked.

"His request, I am sure, was made out of consideration for your feelings," her father went on to explain. "He is very thoughtful of you. Politicians, my dear, have to be thick-skinned, particularly a man in Lewis' position. He is a man of great power, therefore a man peculiarly liable to attack. He cares nothing about it himself, but he hates to think that it might bring you pain, even indirectly." He was silent a moment. "In this instance, I thoroughly agree with him and shall add my request to his own."

Edna shrugged her shoulders, and was silent.

"It's all for the best, my dear," her father went on pleasantly. "Remember I am under many obligations to Mr. Lewis, and you are under even a greater obligation because of your



"I heard from Lewis last night"

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—your betrothal to him. I think it wisest and best that you obey his—our—wishes in this instance.”

“Certainly,” the girl agreed; “but it seems rather absurd—doesn’t it? Everybody in the world will know just what it is except me, and I have a greater right than anybody.”

“The circumstances are unusual,” her father pointed out.

They finished their breakfast in silence and Edna arose to go. At the door she lingered a moment.

“This—this attack,” she queried. “You say it was personal?”

“Purely personal, my dear.”

“Will it in any way affect Francis’—his chance of election?” She faltered a little as she asked the question.

“One can never tell, Edna, just what effect such attacks as this will have.” Mr. Tillinghast faltered a little, too.

The girl’s eyes were blazing.

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"You mean that there is a chance that Francis will be—defeated?"

"There is always a chance," her father told her gently. "Or, it may cause changes in his plans of a totally different nature. After all, suppose you wait and talk it over with Lewis himself. He can make you understand; I couldn't."

"A personal attack, you say?" remarked the girl. "That would involve his integrity, wouldn't it? I could hardly believe that this Jim—this Mr. Warren would descend to that."

Tillinghast arose and went to her. The slender little figure was atremble with indignation.

"He wants the job, my dear," said her father. "There seems to be no limit to what he would do to get it. His campaign throughout has been based upon personalities."

Edna stood staring straight into the puffy eyes for an instant, then turned away suddenly and went to her room.

That afternoon, forty miles away, in War-

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burton, Lewis had decided upon his course and was giving the necessary instructions to Franques.

"See Big Tom Simmonds," he directed, "and tell him that our deal is off."

"Yes, sir."

"I spoke to the Commissioners of Elections about keeping Jim Warren's name off the ballots. Tell them that is off, too."

"Yes, sir." Franques' evil eyes were gleaming; his swarthy face was flushed slightly.

"Some time this afternoon make a dozen copies of this letter of withdrawal I have drafted and get it to all the newspapers in time for publication to-morrow morning."

That was all. Suave, courteous, soft-spoken as ever, Lewis received the newspaper men. He answered no questions—merely smiled genially and told them that in view of the popular demand for Jim Warren, he would not only retire from the race but personally he would bring Jim Warren's name before the caucus of his

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party. That, of course, was equivalent to Jim Warren's election. He didn't care to discuss the slight misunderstanding he had had with Jim Warren. It was trivial and personal.

"How about that fifty-thousand-dollar note?"

He had nothing further to say.

"How about your offer of twenty-five thousand if Jim Warren would quit?"

He had nothing further to say.

"Don't you intend to make any denials?"

He had nothing further to say.

"How about that phonographic interview? How did Jim Warren get it? What about the deal on the mayoralty? What safe was robbed? Who did it? Where was it? When? What was in it?"

Really, gentlemen, he could not discuss the matter further.

There was a grin of triumph on Jim Warren's freckled face on the following morning when he read Lewis' letter of withdrawal and

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coupled therewith his statement. The grin lingered, until, in glancing through his mail, he opened an envelope and took out a single sheet of paper, with just a few lines, unsigned :

“The time never comes when it is necessary to revile an individual merely because you want his political head. I didn’t believe you capable of it.”

It was the handwriting of a woman. A signature would have meant nothing; he knew instantly whence it came, and gazed at it a long time in deep abstraction.

It was a landslide for Jim Warren. Big Tom Simmonds had roared mightily in the heat of his indignation against Lewis when the mayoralty deal was called off and the city slid from under his greedy fingers—roared mightily, and in his excitement thrust in a candidate to oppose Jim Warren or Lewis or whoever else there was to be opposed. Nobody ever heard of his candidate again.

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Lewis received the returns in the seclusion of his apartments, whence he could look down upon the noisy crowd without. At last, wearily, he dropped back into a chair. At that instant his eyes met Franques' and he was startled by the savage exultation he read there.

"What's the matter?" he demanded sharply.

"It's come—it's come at last!" Franques exclaimed fiercely. His claw-like fingers were knotted, his lips tightly compressed. Lewis drew back uneasily.

"What's come? What are you talking about?"

"I'm the next political boss of this state!" Franques burst out violently. "I found Jim Warren; I showed him how to win; I made him. I gave him the photographs of the contents of your safe; I told him every move you planned before you made it; we've tricked you out of your shoes. Now I am the boss!"

For a time Lewis merely stared at him. It was quite clear. This man whom he had

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trusted above all others had betrayed him, had sold him—that was how Jim Warren had made himself invincible. Finally Lewis spoke:

“You dog!” he said.

About midnight Jim Warren, drunk with his victory, forsook the adulation of his followers and went home. He sat there for a long time, thinking of many things. At last the clock struck four. He arose and removed his coat.

“When you mark your cards right, you’ve got to win!” he said grimly. “The big idea is a pippin—yet.” He was silent a moment; then came that illuminating grin of his. “I wonder how much an enterprising, red-headed young fellow could pick up in this new job of mine?” Again he was silent for a little. “I’ll meet her somewhere,” he added irrelevantly. “She said if I won we’d meet again.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE DOUBLE-CROSS

WHEN, by some quirk of Fate, an unknown leaps into sudden and spectacular political success he instantly becomes, by right of victory, that sterling young patriot and rising young statesman; when he fails, the world hoots at him. Jim Warren, the unknown, succeeded. On the morning following that achievement Jim Warren was no more. In his stead there was the Honorable James Palmer Warren, our distinguished fellow-townsmen and newly elected representative from the Warburton District. However, the Honorable James Palmer Warren was no whit less red-headed and blue-eyed and freckle-faced than the original Jim Warren. His arm was as sin-

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ewy, his fist as hard, his grin as ready ; he lived in the same modest room and plugged away at the same old desk.

For a week or more, letters and telegrams of congratulation poured in upon him. The first of these was from Francis Everard Lewis. Jim Warren chuckled as he read it, but it didn't surprise him. Lewis' attitude was as transparent as the ambient air. He had picked up a poker by the hot end ; dexterously and smilingly he was trying to hold on until it cooled off. He couldn't have what he wanted, therefore, he would take what he could get. There was fear back of this craven fawning, but there was politics, too. Jim Warren was a man of power—he had acquired it suddenly and sensationally—and a political boss is compelled to respect power that he can't smash.

Two or three days later came a courteous little note from Dwight Tillinghast, the speaker. It brought Mr. Tillinghast's heartiest congratulations to Mr. Warren upon his splendid

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victory, being altogether the oily sort of effusion that was intended to convey the impression that Tillinghast had been sitting up nights rooting for Jim Warren's success. Tucked away at the bottom was an invitation to dine informally at his home. Jim Warren accepted, knowing perfectly what it must portend. It was simply that Tillinghast was making an effort to win a friend in the new man and he didn't scruple to use his social position to that end. Another bright thought of Lewis'! If Tillinghast would be governor—that, with a United States senatorship in view—he must draw to himself men like Jim Warren.

The dinner was a week or so off; meanwhile Jim Warren had some trivial matters to dispose of. So rapidly had he hewn that he hadn't had time to clear away his chips behind him. Now he started in methodically to clean up. First, in compliance with the state law, he filed his campaign expense account. Its publication brought a smile. It was something like this:

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1 phonograph.....	\$12.00
Lights for meetings.....	8.40
Cigars65
1 pk. of cigarettes.....	.10
<hr/>	
Total	\$21.15

Next Jim Warren resigned from the Atlas Plow Works and began to close up a few personal affairs, in preparation for his removal to Sandringham, the state capital.

These things disposed of, there remained Franques—Franques, that lank, dusty-looking, evil-eyed genius whose betrayal of his master had made Jim Warren possible. Jim Warren was not proud of the means he had employed to win, but he had had no choice. It was that or stay out; and the big idea would have perished of inanition. So it was, from the very beginning, he and Franques had worked with a complete understanding and their plans had fruited perfectly. Franques' motive? He didn't know and he didn't care. He only knew

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that Franques had arranged everything, even down to the silly incident of capturing the burglar; and only once, and that for just a moment, did Lewis suspect.

It was not pleasant for Jim Warren to think over these things and it was still less pleasant to think of the forthcoming reckoning with Franques. He didn't know what to expect; he only knew that Franques was not a part of the big idea—that was still to be put to the touch. Suppose Franques' long pent-up and unexplained hatred against Lewis should be turned against him, Jim Warren? In preparation for the interview Jim Warren placed a small revolver beneath a paper on the table beside him; then, ashamed of himself, he put it back where it belonged.

Franques came to him in answer to his summons—came, meek-faced, and deposited his dusty-looking person on the edge of a chair and his dusty-looking hat on the floor beside him. He had not obtruded since Jim Warren's vic-

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tory; he had waited to be sent for. He could bide his time, for was not he the master? Had he not made Jim Warren? Did he not hold, through Jim Warren, a slice of the state in his hand? Could he not garner his profit at his own will?

"Franques," Jim Warren began abruptly, "I am admitting every obligation to you that you can possibly impose upon me. I'll deny nothing. It was your fight—you won it—I was merely the pawn. We are agreed upon these things as a general ground for this discussion." He stopped and his eyes met those of the other man squarely. There was a moment's tense pause. "Now, I'm going to double-cross you, Franques—pass you out. I've finished with you. Do you get it?"

For a minute or more Franques gazed at him, silent, inscrutable; then drew one of his claw-like hands across his brow as if to sweep away something there. It was his eyes that Jim Warren was watching—he found no ink-

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ling there of what was going through the cunning brain behind them.

"Why?" Franques queried at last. There was not the slightest trace of emotion in his voice.

"You'll understand it better," replied Jim Warren steadily, "if I tell you that I'm going to do to you only what you did to Lewis. I'm going to do it because I've got the foothold I want and it can't be taken away from me. Incidentally, I am going to be the next governor of this state and the power of no man can stop me!"

"What makes you think that?" Franques asked in the same quiet manner. "Do you think that what you have done will get that job for you so soon? Do you think—"

"I know that I have done one thing, which doesn't happen to be known to you or any other person, that will win for me any job within the gift of the people of this state the instant I declare myself," said Jim Warren steadily.

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"There's been one definite idea back of everything I have done thus far—the big idea. With that idea I'm going to stand this state on its head when the time comes."

"What is it?" Franques asked. He didn't seem to be angry or even disappointed. His was the placid tone of one who reasons with a wilful child. Never before had he been able to inspect at close range so monumental an example of egotism. Jim Warren was suffering intensely from arrogance, growing out of an overdose of spotlight. "What is it?" he repeated.

"You only made one mistake in your estimate of me, Franques," Jim Warren continued. "We agreed that I should take the holier-than-thou attitude. I was to pose as an honest man, a representative of labor—that's all. You were to take care of the rest of it. You did. With the power you placed in my hands by your betrayal of Lewis, I won. The mistake you made was your failure to take into account the fact

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that I *am* an honest man. The people of this state suspect it now; before I finish I'll convince 'em of it in a manner they never dreamed of—and won't forget."

"Lots of honest men don't get to be governor." Franques came back to the point that interested him most. "How are you going to do it?"

"How?" Jim Warren echoed. "I've marked the cards. This political game is played with a marked pack. I've marked this pack! I've shuffled 'em myself and dealt myself the high hand. Now I'm going to play it out." He stopped; the tense earnestness of his manner passed, his tone became quite casual. "So far as my relations with you are concerned, you never had a chance. I've no sentiment about it at all. I never intended from the first to do anything but double-cross you, once I was elected. You thought I was easy; I could see it in your eyes that first day we met—I knew it when you made your proposition. I accepted

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that proposition and played upon your selfishness and desire for revenge upon Lewis to use you, to make you advance my interests. I've squeezed you like a lemon; now I've finished with you."

For a long time Franques said nothing. His dream of power, through this man at least, was shattered; argument was useless—he knew that too. Suddenly he looked very old, very weak, very feeble. He picked up his dusty-looking hat and twisted it idly in his hands.

"There is honor even among thieves," he reminded Jim Warren.

"I am not a thief; therefore I don't have to be honest with thieves," Jim Warren replied. "It would be a waste of time to attempt to make you understand some of the subtler reasons that have inspired my conduct; therefore—this is all. I am an ingrate; yes. I have nothing further to say."

Franques arose and wandered aimlessly toward the door. In that moment, as he stood

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regarding this lank, shabby, broken old man, Jim Warren was sorry for him. He had expected a row—he had found only a resignation that was almost pitiful. Crooked or not, he hadn't given the old man a square deal. He was about to say so . . . the door opened and Franques was gone.

So, at last, Jim Warren came to be free. He had played the first hand and won; he had paid his last debt as he had reckoned he would pay it. Clear of that burden, absolutely alone and independent, owing no man any favor, he riffled the cards for the second hand. Now the big idea was to be put to the test!

CHAPTER XIV

THE WONDER GIRL

DWIGHT TILLINGHAST'S invitation had specified the time and the place; and there Jim Warren found—the girl! Clad in some soft clinging stuff that bared the ivory of her throat, she stood beside her father, more distractingly pretty than ever. Her eyes met Jim Warren's demurely, then crinkled into a smile. For a moment Jim Warren merely stared at her in his astonishment.

"My daughter, Edna, Mr. Warren," Tillinghast was saying in that fat, pompous way of his. "Mr. Warren, my dear, has become one of the big young men of our state."

"I know Mr. Warren by his newspaper pictures," Edna said graciously, and the color

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started in her cheeks under the spell of his gaze. "I think, too, I've seen him once—one day in the Sandringham National Bank?"

"And once after that!"

The girl reproved him with a glance suddenly grown cool and extended her hand. He gulped and accepted it impetuously. There followed some platitudes; then, in a sort of daze he permitted himself to be led into the drawing-room. This girl the daughter of Dwight Tillinghast! Well! Well, well, well! He couldn't get over that first shock. And her name was Edna!

"You remember I said I'd see you again if you beat Mr. Lewis?" the girl queried.

"I remember," he said slowly, meaningly; "and that isn't all you said."

"No?" She sat down.

"You said you wouldn't like me."

"You didn't beat him, did you?"

"Beat him?" Jim Warren grinned. "They had to pick him up in a basket."

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"I beg your pardon. You didn't beat him. He withdrew in your favor—didn't he?"

Then, and not before, Jim Warren realized that he was treading upon dangerous ground. Of course she would know Lewis and be friendly with him, because of the close relations of Lewis and her father.

"Mr. Lewis speaks very kindly of you," the girl went on pointedly. "I've heard him discuss you with my father often since your election. You know Mr. Lewis, of course?"

"Yes, I've met him—once!" He was trying to fathom the singular light in her eyes. "Only once," he added absently.

"And you were political enemies at that time?" Edna laughed lightly. "Political enemies! It sounds so horrid and amounts to so little. I can't imagine any one being an enemy of Mr. Lewis."

"No?" Jim Warren was quite polite about it.

"Then, afterward, Mr. Lewis came to see

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you were such a wonderful young man—oh, really wonderful!—and retired in your favor—didn't he?"

"Something of that sort," Jim Warren agreed. What was she driving at? Was she trying to bait him? There was a defensive note in her voice.

"I should think that would have made close friends of you and Mr. Lewis."

"What?"

"His withdrawal in your favor."

"Why?"

Little puckers appeared in the girl's smooth, white brow. She didn't understand the monosyllabic questions.

"It was the magnanimous thing to do—wasn't it?" she queried. "It put you under obligations to him. So, naturally, you must be grateful for his assistance?"

For an instant Jim Warren's face was grave; then he grinned.

"I can't imagine you being so wise politi-

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cally," he remarked banteringly. "You are interested in the game, then?"

"The game?" Edna's eyes sparkled. "The very words to express it. That's what it is— isn't it? A big, brilliant, wonderful game? And naturally I am interested because my— my father is. He has ambitions."

Jim Warren had only known two women in all his life. One of them had been his mother. This girl was a revelation; a figure in a world he had never known. His interest in her was intense; yet, oddly enough, everything she had said had grated on him. Perhaps it was because there was an implied knowledge of things of which he thought women knew nothing; or, perhaps, because she had fashioned Lewis into a tin god of her own imagining! Vaguely he found himself wondering if she knew what Lewis really was? Of course she must know. The newspapers had been full of it and—hang it!—she could read.

He shook off a sudden silence.

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"Did you get home all right that day?" he queried irrelevantly.

"Oh, yes; thanks to you." She was smiling again now; an elusive dimple played about a corner of her mouth. Strange he had never noticed it before!

"Had any more trouble with the new car?"

"No, not a mite. I think there must have been a flaw in the steel pin and— Do you know anything about steel?"

"Something; yes."

Francis Everard Lewis, immaculate in evening dress, appeared in the doorway.

"Ah, Edna!" and he came toward her eagerly. She turned and extended both hands. "Shall I have to say it all over again?"

"Say—what?" she asked.

"How charming you look and—the rest of it?"

Edna flushed and her eyes dropped.

"I believe you have met Mr. Warren, Mr. Lewis?"

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Jim Warren had risen. He hadn't seen Lewis since their fateful interview that day in his private office and he was not certain exactly what was going to happen now. However, he had a good, husky punch up his sleeve if the worst came to the worst; and, besides, he was hardly thinking of that. He was thinking that not only did Edna know Lewis, but evidently she knew him well—well enough for him to address her by her first name; well enough to offer him both her hands; well enough to blush at his compliment. His doubt as to Lewis' attitude was instantly dispelled.

"Of course I know Warren," Lewis exclaimed heartily. He offered his hand; Jim Warren shook it. "Let me repeat, Mr. Warren, the congratulations I wired to you immediately after your election. I didn't believe the man lived who could have done what you did."

"I know you didn't," replied Jim Warren—"that is, I judged it from our conversation that day."

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"The help I was able to give you—"

"It was a great help," Jim Warren interrupted. "If you hadn't been in exactly the position you were I doubt if I could have won."

Jim Warren's sky-blue eyes narrowed a little, his chin was thrust forward slightly; but that haunting grin still played about his mouth. Lewis smiled easily. Edna's keen woman-sense divined some undercurrent that she did not quite understand, and she glanced from one to the other uncertainly.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Mr. Warren," Lewis went on easily. "I like to feel that you are under an obligation to me. Some day I may call upon you to remember it."

That was all—merely a pleasant little clashing of verbal rapiers. Lewis ran on lightly, talking of other things, while Jim Warren permitted himself to grow disturbed at the calm air of proprietorship that he displayed toward Edna. There was something in her attitude

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toward him, too—something that smacked of deep admiration for this man, and more.

Other people came in, four or five of them. Lewis sauntered over toward a group of men; Jim Warren turned to Edna.

"You are interested in politics, you say?"

"I am, yes,"—curiously.

"You read the newspapers, of course?"

Edna's rosebud lips were thrust forward tantalizingly.

"Sometimes; not often," she answered. "I used to read them a great deal where there were things concerning my father, or—some friend."

Jim Warren hesitated and his face grew grave as he framed the next question.

"You must have read something of my fight down in Warburton, then?" he asked. "Pardon me, I don't want to appear egotistical—but you read something of it?"

"I didn't read all of it, because—" She stopped.

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“Because—”

“Because I don’t like personalities.” Her eyes met his steadily. “The time never comes when it is necessary to attack an individual for no other reason except that one wants his political head.”

Jim Warren stared at her dully. Then she did know who and what Lewis was! She must know!

“‘Reville’ was the word you used in your note to me,” he reminded her accusingly.

Edna’s brows were lifted scornfully; there was a set defiance about the rosebud mouth.

“In my note to you?” she inquired coldly. “What note, pray?”

“It came too late, anyway,” Jim Warren explained evenly. “Lewis had already quit.”

There were strange lapses in Jim Warren’s recollections of what happened after that. Edna and Lewis sat side by side, he knew, and seemed to be absorbed in each other; and every one else talked politics, and he was not inter-

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ested. After dinner he joined a party of men in the smoking-room and they talked politics again. It was there that Jim Warren met for the first time a sleek, round person named Tyson—a duplicate copy of Tillinghast trimmed down.

One glaring thing he did remember; he couldn't have forgotten if he would. It seared its imprint upon his brain; and as he wandered on through the cool streets toward his hotel he seemed to be suffocating.

"If I am elected governor for the next term—" Tillinghast had started to say.

"When you are elected governor, you mean," Lewis had corrected banteringly. "We've got to elect you governor, because Edna says our wedding must have the governor's uniformed staff as a background. It's up to me to elect you."

Jim Warren remembered that, all right.

CHAPTER XV

THE PEACE CONFERENCE

MORE than usual interest attached to Jim Warren's initial appearance as a member of that august body that made the laws of his state. In the first place, he, an unknown maker of plows, had whaled the life out of Lewis, who had been looked upon as invincible; in the second place, despite the fact that he had accepted the support of Lewis' machine, it was generally understood that he was an independent—possibly the only one in the legislature; in the third place, there are always dormant possibilities in a red-headed young man who had done the impossible thing. Besides, he was a representative of labor and there was a very wide and growing belief that he was incorruptible. Still, the newspaper men had found

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him friendly; terse and to the point; while the cartoonists reveled in the luxury of his freckles and that haunting grin of his.

Jim Warren's first sight of the legislative chamber on that first day of its convening was one he never forgot—a vast hall, gay with flowers and flags and bunting, packed with humanity from the speaker's desk, almost hidden behind a pyramid of blooms, to the long gallery that ran around three sides of the room. Seemingly this gallery was given over to women—wives, daughters and sweethearts of these men on the floor below. A glow of pride enveloped him when he realized that he, Jim Warren, was a part of that splendid picture. If only the little mother had lived! As it was, no woman in all that mass of fluttering ribbons and plumes and handkerchiefs had a word or thought for him; none knew him, unless— She would be there, of course! He turned and studied the gallery deliberately. He didn't see her.

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From the moment of his entrance Jim Warren was made to feel his importance, for he had instantly been surrounded by a besieging body of alert-faced young men—newspaper reporters. He was the chap who put it all over Lewis, and they didn't permit him to forget it. Now that he was here on the job, what was he going to do? He had accepted Lewis' support; did that mean that he would vote with Lewis' party? Did he understand that as an independent he would have absolutely no power otherwise? Did he have the universal panacea for all labor troubles concealed anywhere about his person? Now, confidentially, what was the real inside history of that flop of Lewis' after the phonograph episode? He wasn't married, of course? How old was he? And a few thousand other questions.

A large man, with a large stick, finally took Jim Warren away from the reporters and led him to a desk in a remote corner of the chamber—a desk that was almost hidden beneath an

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enormous mound of flowers. Jim Warren stared. He unsteadily turned over the card on the flowers and there was an absurd tightening of his throat as he read it:

"From Old Bob and the Boys!"

"God bless 'em!" murmured Jim Warren softly.

There was another bunch of flowers, too—a small, tissue-wrapped cluster of violets, cool, damp, fragrant. There was no card. Jim Warren's eyes opened in wonder; then he turned slowly and for the second time studied the mass of color in the gallery. No; he didn't see her. It was foolish, of course, that he should imagine such a thing; but if not she, then who?

There came the call to order, the tedious work of organization, the partial announcement of committees and all the other routine. Late in the afternoon of a weary day, Lewis, with the freedom of a quondam member, appeared beside his desk. Apparently he had

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forgotten all those things that had gone before. He brought a smile and a pleasant word.

"How do you like it as far as you've gone?"

"I can answer that better in a month from now," Jim Warren grinned.

"It's not a very good seat you have here," Lewis remarked carelessly. "I don't suppose you would object to a better one if I could arrange it?"

"Go ahead," said Jim Warren.

"And how about committees? What have you drawn so far?"

"Church and Parish Affairs." Again Jim Warren grinned. "I can't see myself setting the state on fire as long as they hold me to that."

"Some of the committees haven't been completed," Lewis remarked musingly. "I don't suppose you'd object if I said a word for you in that direction? I happen to be pretty close to Tillinghast."

"Go as far as you like."

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Lewis strolled away and Jim Warren, watching him with narrowed eyes, fell to wondering. What was Lewis looking for? Another bump? From Lewis his thoughts traveled on to a distractingly pretty girl; and she reminded him of violets. He picked up the dewy blossoms and inhaled them deeply.

A legislature is like a setting hen—it takes it a week or more to get down to business. Jim Warren spent that week in observation; and the longer he looked the more he was impressed with the bigness of this particular bit of state machinery. He was in the kindergarten; he didn't know his A-B-abs. Slowly, too, he came to see the tremendous power of the speaker; and, seeing that, he knew that Lewis, despite the fact that he was no longer a member, had greater influence than he had ever had before. He owned Tillinghast, body and soul. He was out to make him governor and Tillinghast was paying for that job in advance as far as he was able to.

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Francis Everard Lewis stepped out of his automobile one night in front of a dingy lodging house in a dingy side street and rang the bell. A disheveled maid-servant answered.

"Does Mr. Warren live here?" Lewis inquired—"Mr. James Palmer Warren?"

"Third floor front," barked the girl.

"May I see him, please?"

"Sure. Right up them steps—two flights—front room."

The girl vanished in the gloom of the hall and Lewis climbed the stairs. A deuce of a place to live, this! Phew! Onions! Lewis' delicate nostrils twitched; his lips curled downward.

He paused before a door and rapped.

"Come in," called Jim Warren.

Lewis entered. Jim Warren, *sans* collar, *sans* coat, with his sleeves rolled up, had risen and was standing near a table, where evidently he had been writing. At sight of Lewis his face flushed a little, his lean jaw was thrust

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forward, his blue eyes glittered. Instantly it passed—that inextinguishable grin returned to his lips.

“Hello!” he greeted.

“Good evening,” said Lewis cordially. He offered an ever-ready hand, feeling vaguely that here, away from the eyes of the world, Jim Warren would refuse it—but Jim Warren didn’t.

“Sit down?” he invited, instead.

“I can only stay a few minutes,” Lewis remarked. “By the way, do you find your new seat in the chamber an improvement on the other one?”

“Yes, thanks.”

“That’s good.” Lewis lighted a proffered cigar and settled back in his chair languidly. “Warren, I’m up here under a flag of truce.” He paused and smiled. “You don’t happen to have a loaded phonograph about?”

“Not this time.” Jim Warren grinned.

“Under a flag of truce,” Lewis continued

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listlessly. "I want to make friends with you. It's probable that you and I will see a good deal of each other during the present session and it seems absurd that we should be always snapping and snarling at each other."

"It does," Jim Warren agreed readily.

"You beat me—you made me quit," Lewis ceded magnanimously. "I haven't a word of criticism of the methods you employed, unusual as they were. We'll say no more about that part. I can do you good up here and you can do me good. You could sit in that legislative chamber for forty years and never get anywhere, for the simple reason that you're inexperienced and you are not with either of the big parties. If you wanted to do anything for your constituents, you couldn't do it without the aid of one of those parties—to be more explicit, without the aid of my party. You are beginning to see that?"

"I am,"—readily.

"Well, what's the use?"

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"None at all." There was a short silence. "I don't feel that I owe you any apologies, Lewis, for our fight was all in the game. There's no reason why we shouldn't forget all about it. Frankly, after all that large time I had getting up here, I've got to do something for Warburton, and I can't do it alone." He was thoughtful for a time. "As I look back on it now I find that my campaign was destructive rather than constructive."

"It was,"—heartily.

"Now that I'm here, I've got to deliver the goods."

"You've the right idea, Warren." Lewis was fairly beaming. It had been perfectly simple after all. He studied the guileless innocence of this freckled face with a new interest and decided that, properly handled, Jim Warren was a mere child, plastic and tractable. Having reached this conclusion, he was off on another tack: "You remember I spoke to you a short time ago about your committees?"

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Jim Warren nodded.

"There are two or three places still open—particularly one in the Committee on Public Structures." Lewis was studying Jim Warren's face keenly. "It's an important committee, as you know. Tillinghast has been considering you for the place, because he knows you to be a practical man."

Jim Warren's sky-blue eyes gleamed with gratification.

"I came up partly to tell you this and to suggest that if you get an invitation to Tillinghast's place for a week-end it would be to your advantage to accept it. Is it necessary to say more?"

Jim Warren rose and smashed one clenched fist into the palm of his hand. If he, a first-year man, could only get on one of the big committees! He had not dared to hope for so much; and yet—in those committees was the power.

"I understand," he said. "What am I to do

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for this?" He was searching Lewis' bland face. "How do I pay for it?"

"Pay for it?" Lewis repeated as if astonished. "You know, you've got a totally wrong idea of what the legislature is," he went on. "There are things to be done and some one must do them. Occasionally we'll admit there is something questionable, but everybody in the legislature isn't crooked. You'll have to get that idea out of your head."

Jim Warren took it at its face value.

"I'll go," he said.

"Do," said Lewis. "You'll be back Sunday evening, I dare say? I may run by and see you for a moment, to see how it came out." He rose and drew on his gray suède gloves. "I had a deuce of a time finding your place here," he remarked carelessly. "You'll pardon me, I know; but you are abominably situated for a man of your position. If Warburton should send a delegation up here to see you you'd—" He stopped.

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"I'm poor, Lewis," Jim Warren explained simply. "I gave up two thousand a year to take eight hundred. I can't afford better than this."

Lewis poked at a design on the skimpy carpet with a patent-leather toe. He seemed on the point of saying something more, but apparently changed his mind. After a little he went out.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RECOGNITION

“**W**OMAN,” says the dictionary, “is an adult human female.” What a libel it is, to be sure! We know it’s a libel—you and I and Jim Warren—we who have fallen under the subtle spell of woman’s witchery; we who have basked in the lure of her haunting snile; we who have gazed upon the glory of her gold-burned hair; we who have been stricken sheer dumb by the mystery and coquetry of her eyes; we who have dreamed rose-dreams and eaten to repletion of the lotus—we know that’s all hocus-pocus. “An adult human female!” Forsooth! So is the moon a piece of green cheese and the sun a pennyworth of sulphur matches—and the star-pierced sky a tin-dipper turned topsy-turvy over all.

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Jim Warren meditated gently upon these things at the end of his day of awakening. He had expected a sordid day, a day of political trafficking. Instead, it had been a day filled to bursting with the charm of Her; a day of sensuous delight to be viewed through half-veiled eyes; a day of gay chatter and lazy content, unmarred by one thought beyond the fleeting present. Somewhere out in the mercenary world men toiled and haggled and died and were born again; somewhere out there great games were being played for great stakes; but here was he in this big, rambling country house, perched on a crag overlooking the thunderous sea. Everything else was very far away, indistinct, immaterial—for She was here. For that one day he chose not to remember that he was a maker of plows and she one of a class apart, a daughter of millions, intrenched behind those barriers that convention says must not be broken down by the man who works with his hands. She belonged to Lewis,

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yes; but he didn't permit that thought to disturb the serenity of that wonderful day.

They had breakfasted alone, Edna and Jim Warren. She had come to him there in the sun-drenched breakfast-room rosy as the dawn, vibrant with life, a smile in her eyes.

"Isn't it a glorious view?" She swept a hand toward the windows. Far below, the surf crashed against the jagged breast of the rocks; on the horizon white sails fluttered in the brilliant January sunshine. "Father and I come here every week-end, rain or shine, snow or sleet. This is our part of the week. I get very tired of the city, but here—I love this place." She extended her arms in a gesture, all-enveloping. "In summer, of course, we live here."

"I can imagine you would love it," said Jim Warren.

She sat down and babbled of many things—of flower gardens she planned; of curling, purple waters on the beach; of gaunt gray stones in the hills; of birds and trailing vines and

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pictures and music—and automobiles. He said little. He was content to listen to the rhythm of her voice, to watch the play of expression on her face, to study the color of her eyes. He wondered what color they were. They seemed all colors, yet none.

After breakfast he had smoked a while, then wandered idly about the house. Every nook and corner of it reflected the magic of her touch. He found it in the sturdy comfort of the great living-room, in the daintiness of the sun-bathed conservatory, in the simplicity of the music-room. The town house was merely a show place for furniture and art, and rare and curious trifles; here was a home. There was a cheerful litter of books and ribbons and feminine knickknacks; and on a spindle-legged work-table was an embroidery ring with a half-worked flower in the center. Jim Warren ventured to pick it up and look at it. He didn't remember that he had seen one since his mother—

Pending that time when his host should

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choose to appear, Jim Warren went to his room for his heavy coat, intending to go for a stroll. Quite involuntarily, as he passed along the hall, he glanced through a half-open door and saw—a slipper, turned upside down on the floor. The sight of it startled him. He averted his eyes quickly as though he had gazed upon forbidden things.

When he came down-stairs again he heard Edna in the music-room. She was playing very softly and singing something—he didn't know what. He peered in. She recognized his presence by a sidelong glance and a little smile, then went on to the end of her song.

"Isn't it charming?" She referred to the song.

"It is." He referred to the voice.

"It should be sung more brilliantly, of course," she explained, "but I can't be brilliant when papa's asleep." She laughed a little. "It makes him fussy."

Jim Warren didn't go for his stroll after all.

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He dropped the heavy coat across a chair and sat down.

"Please go on," he requested.

"What shall I sing? What is your favorite?"

"I have no favorite."

Wrapped in the ineffable charm of young womanhood, at times oblivious of his presence, she sat at the piano for a long time playing, occasionally singing, always softly. It fitted in with Jim Warren's mood. There had been so much of clangor and tumult in his life! He loved to watch the coruscations of light in her hair, the grace and mastery of her touch, the dreaminess in her eyes. She seemed very far away.

Suddenly she whirled around on the piano stool.

"Do you know, I can't get over the impression that you and I met somewhere before that day in the bank?" she exclaimed impulsively. "I had seen your picture, of course, but even before that—"

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"I had never seen your picture and I had the same impression."

"Odd, isn't it?" There were thoughtful little crinkles about her eyes. "Have you lived long in Warburton?"

"All my life."

"I hardly think it could have been there, because I don't remember that I was ever there but once; that was when I was a little girl. I remember that very distinctly." The perplexity passed from her face; she smiled at some recollection. "Father and I went through an enormous factory or foundry, or something of the sort, while we were there. He had gone out to see Mr. Chase, the manager, on business and I insisted on seeing the shops where the men were at work. It was wonderful!"

In that instant Jim Warren knew her.

"The Atlas Plow Works," he said. "I am—or rather I was until I resigned a short while ago—superintendent there."

"Superintendent?" she repeated thought-

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fully. "Perhaps that's where I saw you!" He chose to remain silent; he wanted her to remember him. "That was nine or ten years ago; if you were superintendent then you must have been a very young superintendent."

"I have been superintendent only for three or four years." He was smiling, waiting.

After a moment she shook her head.

"That was one of the wonder days of my life," she ran on. "It was all so hot and noisy and clanky. It seemed incredible to me that men could work in such a place. In the foundry, I remember, they moved about in the murk, like demons, I thought. There was a spouting and spatter of iron so hot that it ran like water. They took it in ladles and poured it into boxes full of sand."

"Molds," Jim Warren told her.

"I could feel the heat on my face all the way across the room, yet they didn't seem to mind. I am sure at some time Dante must have visited a foundry!" She was gazing at him now with

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those wonder eyes he remembered so well—how had he ever forgotten! “After that we went into the hammer room—trip-hammers, don’t they call them?—where they were making plows. And there were furnaces, too—great open-mouthed, greedy-looking furnaces.”

She paused. Jim Warren’s sky-blue eyes were fixed upon her face. Finally he took up the thread of the narrative:

“And you and your father and Mr. Chase stopped near one of the hammers and looked on while the hammer-man worked—and finally Mr. Chase placed his watch on the anvil and the hammer-man smashed the crystal. Then you placed your watch on the anvil and that crystal was only cracked! And when you were going away you turned back at the door and smiled at the hammer-man—didn’t you?”

Charming bewilderment was depicted on her face; she was struggling to remember. Her hand involuntarily touched the watch on her bosom—the same watch.

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"Then—then you must have been there?"

"I was"—Jim Warren was smiling—"I was the hammer-man."

Suddenly Edna remembered. It was something in the whimsical, sky-blue eyes of him that bridged the chasm of years. Sudden realization brought sudden confusion. She didn't seem able to reconcile things all at once. The hammer-man, with arms bared to the shoulders, grimed, sinewy—was this man the same?—this rather well-dressed, clean-cut, smiling individual opposite her?

"It leaves me quite—quite breathless," she faltered at last, with a queer little laugh. "I can hardly make myself believe that we—"

"I understand."

Now that she remembered, Jim Warren wondered if it would make any difference. He knew grimly that it was not meet that they should fraternize on a common level. The color surged into her cheeks. Why? He asked that question many times.

CHAPTER XVII

JIM WARREN WINS A POT

IT was on the morning following that day of rose-dreams that Dwight Tillinghast bared his hypocritical soul to Jim Warren; and an unsavory spectacle it was. Psychologically the exhibition was interesting, politically it might be useful; so, in furtherance of the big idea and despite an unholy inclination to take the honorable speaker by his august windpipe and throttle him, Jim Warren listened attentively. Smug and lofty and unutterably pompous Tillinghast was—typical of a class that, having all else, seeks political preferment. With wealth at his command, coupled with an unbounded egotism and the support of Francis Everard Lewis, he couldn't see why he shouldn't have anything he wanted. In fact, he didn't mind confiding in Mr. Warren to the extent of say-

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ing he was going to be the next governor—and, by the way, that was one of the things they must discuss. It didn't happen that Mr. Warren was committed to any other man?

No; Mr. Warren was not.

"Ah!" It was as if a vast wind were blowing in a cavern. "Could I, in that event, count upon your support?"

"It all depends," Jim Warren told him.

"It all depends?" Tillinghast echoed.

"I'd just as soon see you governor as any man I know, except myself," said Jim Warren; "but—"

"Except yourself?" Tillinghast seemed a bit aghast at the suggestion. His fat, shallow eyes were reassured at the grin on Jim Warren's face. "Ah! I see! A joke! Ha-ha!"

"Yes, a joke—ha-ha!"

"Very good." Tillinghast paused ponderously ere he voiced the next question. "You—and Mr. Lewis had some sort of an interview the other night, I believe?"

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Jim Warren nodded.

"I'm glad to see that you are friends again." Tillinghast rubbed his pudgy hands together. "Possibly something was said about a—a vacant place in the Committee on Public Structures?"

"I believe the matter was mentioned, yes."

"Well—er—that vacant place—er—"

"I think, perhaps, I can say what you want to say, Mr. Tillinghast. You'll give me the vacant place on that committee if I support you in your fight for governor—is that it?"

Tillinghast seemed astonished at the ease and directness with which the proposition had been put.

"Precisely." He beamed.

"And, if we agree on terms, then what?" Jim Warren wanted to know.

The honorable speaker rose and wandered aimlessly about the library for a time, pausing now and then to shoot a curious glance at Jim Warren. This red-headed man made him feel

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uncomfortable; there was a direct, cold-blooded manner about him that he didn't altogether like. Jim Warren sat gazing at the floor, smoking placidly.

"I've made no secret among my friends of my candidacy for governor, Mr. Warren," he said at last. "Now I have no fears for Mr. Lewis' end of the state—your end—but I am a little afraid of the upper end of the state. Mr. Lewis and I have agreed upon a plan that will insure all the state to me. The fight will have to be made in the Committee on Public Structures."

"Yes?" Jim Warren lifted his gaze inquiringly.

"Mr. Lewis and I think—in fact, we know," he amended—"that the way to pull the upper part of the state solidly is to give those people up there what they want. Now there has been some clamor up there for recreation piers, a new state school and libraries, and what-not. The present governor is opposed to the expen-

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diture of the money necessary for all these things; and—”

“It would run into millions—wouldn’t it?” asked Jim Warren.

“It would, yes,” Tillinghast agreed complacently. “If bills should be introduced to this end—that is, giving them all they want and more—and I, as speaker, stood back of them and made a fight for them—do you see I would become their champion? I would be the man they want. I would—”

“And it would only cost the state a few million dollars?” Jim Warren put in. He glanced up quite casually into Tillinghast’s fat face. “In other words, the state would pay for the privilege of electing you governor?”

Tillinghast didn’t like the way he put it. What a coarse, tactless person, to be sure!

“You don’t understand, Mr. Warren,” he went on to explain. “If any bill was passed the governor would veto it; and, in the first place, it couldn’t be passed. Certainly we couldn’t

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pass it over the governor's veto, but the moral effect would be the same."

Slowly it dawned upon Jim Warren.

"Oh!" he said. "It's only a grand-stand play."

Tillinghast grunted. Why did this man insist on calling everything by its first name?

"As a matter of fact, I don't care a hang whether those people up there get their recreation piers and schools and libraries or not," the speaker went on; "but the bill would precipitate a big fight and, whatever else came of it, it would strengthen me in that end of the state."

"And why," asked the maker of plows quietly—"why does Lewis choose me for this committee?"

"Because you are a fighter, Mr. Warren." The speaker laid a pudgy hand on his shoulder and beamed upon him fatly. "Because you have suddenly become one of the influential men of the state. With you on my side—don't you see the possibilities?"

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The man's hand was hot and moist on his shoulder; Jim Warren wriggled out from under it and went to the window. His sinewy fingers were clenched.

"You are planning to hand them a gold brick up there and I am to be the middleman?" he asked slowly.

"Not at all!"—suavely. "I'm going to try to give them something they want. If I don't succeed it isn't my fault. You are the man to make the fight. I think so well of you—Lewis and I both think so well of you—that not only are we—am I—willing to make you a member of that committee but we'd be glad to make you chairman."

Chairman! The word sent a thrill through the sturdy figure of Jim Warren. Chairman! The big idea was coming through! It was a moment or more before Jim Warren trusted himself to speak.

"And what else do I get?" he queried quietly.

"What else? I don't understand."

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Jim Warren turned upon him suddenly.

"Tillinghast, I know your situation precisely," he said tersely. "Lewis was absolute dictator of his end of the state. When I beat him I ripped his following wide open. That following is mine now. He still handles the money-bag and his influence in the legislature is no less than it was; but among the voters in my end of the state he has lost cast. Now you figure that if you have Lewis on your side, as you have, and can get me on your side, you will gain all that Lewis has lost and more. Isn't that so?"

The honorable speaker hummed and hawed about it.

"It is." Jim Warren answered his own question. "In other words, with both of us on your side, that end of the state is certain to go for Tillinghast. I am absolutely necessary to you if you carry that end of the state; it is necessary to placate me with this committee job—and all I have to do is to further your interests

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in the other end of the state with this—this gold brick. Now, I'm asking you what else I am to get out of it? I mean, of course, in addition to the place on Public Structures."

Tillinghast gasped and sat down heavily. He was overwhelmed with a sense of impending disaster. Something was going to drop in a minute. This red-headed whirlwind was the person to drop it. Why hadn't he let Lewis deal with him?

"I had assumed that a place on one important committee would satisfy a first-year man, who rarely gets on any committee of consequence," he argued. "I am certain that I am violating every precedent by making you chairman of that committee. Now you want more!"

Jim Warren stared at him reflectively.

"I happen to know there's still a vacant place on Railroads," he went on. "If I could get that too—"

The honorable speaker moaned a little and perspiration broke out on his brow.

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"It's unheard of!" he expostulated. "I'd antagonize men whom I couldn't afford to antagonize. I'd—"

Suddenly that illuminating grin of Jim Warren's broke forth and shone like a beacon of hope. Tillinghast drew a long breath of relief.

"I tell you what I'll do, Tillinghast," Jim Warren suggested; "I'll compromise with you: You make me chairman of Public Structures and give me a place on Railroads—or I won't accept any place on any committee."

Here was confusion and more of it. Tillinghast edged away a little from the calloused hands of him. The man was insane!

"In other words, give me all I want or nothing!" Jim Warren continued naïvely.

"But I don't see—" Tillinghast began helplessly.

"All or nothing," Jim Warren repeated. His mouth had grown hard again. "You won't have to urge me to make your fight for recreation piers and the rest of it. I'll make a fight

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and put fireworks in it. Whether you believe in 'em or not, I do. I believe in a state giving its citizens all it can afford and more. All or nothing!" he concluded abruptly.

The honorable speaker was a little pale but thoroughly tame when the new chairman of the Committee on Public Structures and the new member of the Committee on Railroads went out of the room whistling.

CHAPTER XVIII

HALF-SPOKEN TRUTHS

THEY came out of the house together, Edna Tillinghast and Jim Warren—Edna slim and graceful in her short walking skirt, heavily booted, heavily gloved, with the glory of her hair hidden beneath a saucy tam-o'-shanter. They came out of the house together into the winter sunshine. There was a tang of salt in the air—swept in from the sea which spumed on the rocks—and a boisterous, playful wind, which painted Edna's cheeks the color of a rose and whipped her skirts about her.

"Which shall it be?" she asked at the end of the long drive. "Over the hills or along the beach?"

"If you leave it to me," answered Jim Warren, "I say the beach. I like the ocean. A hill

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can only stand majestically still and look imposing, but the ocean can kick up a deuce of a row if it has a mind."

"Do I understand from that that you like a deuce of a row, as you call it?" Edna was laughing.

"We grow to like what we're used to."

"You are used to rows?"—demurely.

"I've spent the last twelve years of my life in a plow factory. And now here I'm in politics!" He grinned. "I mean that I'd like Niagara Falls more than I would Gibraltar, for the sole reason that one moves and the other doesn't."

"I think I understand. You like energy for energy's sake. I should imagine you would." She gave him a sidelong glance. "You're that type of man."

They walked on in silence for a long way, their feet crunching rhythmically in the gravel of the beach. Finally Jim Warren paused to throw a stone into the tumbling surf. She

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watched it until a spurt of water far out marked the spot where it fell. Then, again they walked on.

"It's very curious that you and I should meet again, isn't it?" he remarked idly.

"Curious? Not particularly. Why?"

He didn't say; he didn't know. Gradually there was stealing over him the spell of yesterday—that strange, quiet content which he was coming to associate with her. Conversation seemed utterly useless. She, too, seemed to feel the mystic charm of silence. When she did speak it was merely because it seemed necessary to say something.

"Do you intend to make a—a profession of politics?"

"Well, I should hate to have people call me a professional politician," he said. "I'm in it to stay, if that's what you mean. I'm ambitious, you know."

"Naturally. And what is your ambition?"

"I haven't the faintest idea yet, beyond—

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beyond certain things." He looked down at her gravely. "I don't know where I'll stop."

"Well, the next step up would be the state senate, wouldn't it?" She smiled. "State Senator Warren! It would sound very imposing and sonorous!"

"Ye-es," Jim Warren agreed.

"Then Congressman Warren! Then Governor Warren! Then United States Senator Warren! Then—"

"Just a minute, please. This rapid promotion is making me dizzy."

The girl laughed. With the laugh passed that singular moodiness which she had felt stealing upon her.

"I consider myself rather an apt pupil in this political game," he remarked, his eyes, grown whimsical again, fixed on her face. "I hope to cut out some of the intermediate rungs of the ladder. In other words, it is my modest intention to climb the political stairs two steps at a time."

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"Well, please don't get the governorship bee in your bonnet. Papa wants that."

Jim Warren looked at her quickly with narrowed eyes; the remark was innocent of meaning.

"Isn't it queer," she went on musingly, "how the pursuit of an ambition makes one oblivious to everything else? Ambition, after all, is a lust for power and power is what we all seek— isn't it? Papa wants to be the next governor—he will be the next governor—but he won't be satisfied with that. He's already looking on ahead toward the United States senatorship. Really, I don't believe it has ever occurred to him that while he is governor he may be able to do things for the people. He doesn't seem to think of that at all. He's only thinking of what he can do as governor to advance his chances of becoming United States senator."

Vaguely Jim Warren was wondering whether the girl knew how accurately she had summarized the situation. Of course, she

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didn't know, but he couldn't have said it more pointedly himself. She turned upon him with shining eyes.

"Mr. Lewis tells me that your political future is assured," she added. "I'm very glad. I like to think that you will owe all your achievements to his generosity."

"To his—what?" asked Jim Warren.

"His generosity," she explained. "I mean his withdrawal, of course. That made your election possible."

"Why, I'd have—" And there Jim Warren stopped; he had remembered the ties that bound this girl to Lewis. "I forgot. You didn't read the newspaper accounts of my campaign."

"No." Her eyes dropped. She had become quite serious. "I told you why. Let's not go into that again." She was silent a moment; then brightly: "You interrupted yourself. You started to say something, then shut up like a clam. What was it?"

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"You know about my campaign only from what Mr. Lewis has told you?"

"Yes." Her eyes opened a little. "He explained all of it to me—why he retired in your favor and the rest of it."

Jim Warren flung another stone into the sea. He, too, was serious—deadly serious.

"I don't think we'd better discuss politics, Miss Tillinghast," he remarked irrelevantly.

"Why not?" There was a perplexed wrinkle in her brow. "Why shouldn't we? What was it you started to say?"

"It doesn't amount to anything, really." Suddenly Jim Warren tired of this game of half-spoken truths. He was possessed of an idea to make her understand. "I started to say," he went on deliberately, "that I would have beaten Lewis anyhow. His withdrawal meant nothing."

Edna stared at him with dilated eyes.

"You mean you would have won without Mr. Lewis' support?"

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"Certainly." He made no pretense of softening an obvious fact.

"How?"—imperiously.

"How?" Jim Warren repeated blankly. "By continuing to do what I started out to do; by showing Lewis'—er—his 'connection with—er—" He stopped abruptly.

"By continuing your attacks on Mr. Lewis, you mean?" she demanded hotly. "It's easy to campaign on personalities. That's what you were doing, wasn't it?"

For a moment Jim Warren regarded her tensely. A tendril of her hair was blowing free across her face; her limpid eyes were alive as flame.

"I shouldn't have called it that," he said slowly.

"But that's what it was!"

"There are personalities and personalities. If I should criticize the cut of a man's coat or his cross-eyes or his bow-legs, that is one thing. On the other hand, if I should attack his public

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record and show that he was—er—show that he had made mistakes which—which compromised his honesty, that is quite another matter.”

There was nothing of fear in Edna’s sudden drawing away from him—only aversion. He saw it instantly and understood it. If it had been only fear—

“Do you pay all your debts of gratitude in this coin?” she asked coldly.

“I owe no debt of gratitude to—” He stopped, ashamed of himself.

“I’m not a child, Mr. Warren. I understand that for political gain it is always possible to magnify a trivial incident into a mountain of evil if one is clever, as you are, and if one has his partizans, as you have.”

“You don’t know why he quit in my favor!” he went on ruthlessly.

“I do know. He explained it to me.”

“He must have had a busy minute of it!”

The girl’s face went white with anger. She



"I owe no debt of gratitude to——"

HALF-SPOKEN TRUTHS

turned upon him with the reproof that burned upon her lips.

"That's cowardly!" Her voice was broken by the intensity of her emotion. "Cowardly!" she repeated helplessly.

"I beg your pardon," said Jim Warren hastily. "I shouldn't have said that. I was afraid a political discussion would result in—" A madness seemed to seize upon him. What was the good of all this dissimulation? She must understand sometime. He would make her understand now. "If a soldier, who is sworn to defend his country, allows himself to be bribed to betray that country, they shoot him, don't they?"

"Well?"

"They don't shoot members of the legislature."

"You mean that Mr. Lewis—"

"Some day you will understand."

CHAPTER XIX

JIM WARREN AWAKES

NEVER before in his thirty-two years had Jim Warren come face to face with the eternal problem of woman. It took him days and days to discover for himself a thing Adam knew thousands of years ago—that woman is irreducible by any known formula, mathematical or otherwise. If there had only been figures and symbols and rules! But there is none—alas! In the absence of these he betook himself to the solitude of his room and attempted to reason it all out. Now, reason is not only inapplicable but wholly superfluous in any consideration of the woman problem. So is logic. But Jim Warren didn't know that.

On the evening of his return to the city

JIM WARREN AWAKES

Lewis dropped in, as he had said he would. Jim Warren stared at him dully.

"Well, how did you come out?" Lewis wanted to know.

"Tillinghast has made me chairman of the Committee on Public Structures," said Jim Warren.

"Very good!" That was according to the plan.

"And a member of the Committee on Railroads."

"The Committee on—" Lewis stopped, speechless, and gazed at him in utter astonishment. "Did you—er—draw a gun on him—or anything?"

"No!"—simply.

"What else?" Lewis was sarcastic.

"Nothing." Jim Warren didn't know it.

After a little while Lewis went away and Jim Warren resumed his pondering on the problem in hand. It was simple enough, consisting as it did of only one question: Why

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couldn't a woman—Edna Tillinghast, to be exact—understand that a man who sold his own vote and influence in the legislature of his state, and trafficked in the votes of others, was just as much a traitor to his country as was a soldier who walked into the enemy's camp and delivered over the plans of campaign? Of course, in this instance, the girl loved the man; but should love make her blind to his crookedness? Evidently it had—but should it? In all his moody ponderings he was able to find only one answer to that.

There was a hullabaloo in the legislative chamber on the following morning when Dwight Tillinghast announced the Committee on Public Structures and the Committee on Railroads. Every precedent had been violated! Everybody said it at once and, there being no possible chance for argument, there followed the question: "Why?"

"Because Mr. Tillinghast wanted a practical

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man on those two committees, where a practical man was needed," Lewis explained urbanely to the scowling mob that besieged him. "Mr. Warren is practical."

Jim Warren sat through the uproar with far-away thoughts. . . . The mere fact that she loved him was no reason why she shouldn't realize that he was crooked. Why, then, was she blind to it? Was it that she didn't understand political right and wrong? Was it because of the lies of her father and of Lewis? Had they made her believe that all those charges by which he had made Lewis quit were mere vapory nothings—things of no moment, except in so far as they might arouse sentiment against him? She believed that Lewis' withdrawal had been really a magnanimous act; therefore all that Jim Warren had said and done in opposition to him had strengthened her belief in his generosity. At the last she had accused him, Jim Warren, of being ungrateful! She had said she was not a child. Jim Warren

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tried his best to make himself believe that she was a child! If he could only have believed that!

Lewis came and stood by Jim Warren's desk, looking out over the chamber with cold, cynical eyes. There was a sneer on his face.

"It kicked up one hell of a young row, all right!" he volunteered.

"What?" asked Jim Warren.

"What!" Lewis repeated. He stared at Jim Warren a moment and went away.

. . . As opposed to this generous hypothesis, there was another—an ugly one. Perhaps she did understand and sought to palliate Lewis' crookedness! Riches make their possessors arrogant and give them standards of which the unit is the dollar mark. Was that it? Her father was a rich, complacent, fat, overfed hypocrite. Was she, too, a hypocrite? The glitter of her luxurious life, the emptiness of it all—had it utterly crushed every fine instinct in her—every instinct of honesty? Was

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her attitude that of an innocent one who didn't understand or of a brazen one who didn't care?

Days passed and still that last question remained unanswered. The expected bills providing for recreation piers and a new state school and half a dozen libraries were dumped in on the house one day by Representative Tyson, who incidentally was also on Public Structures. These were the bills Jim Warren was to fight for—to further Tillinghast's golden dream of the governorship. However, they would have to pass a third reading before they reached the committee; meanwhile Jim Warren had time to brood. His abstraction at last aroused a glimmer of suspicion in Lewis' mind.

"The bills are all in," he remarked to Jim Warren gratuitously one day. There was something about Jim Warren's attitude that he didn't like.

"I know it," was the reply.

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"They'll be before your committee in a day or so."

"There's nothing I can do, yet—is there?"

"No."

"Well?"

It was a dismissal. Lewis understood it as such. He stood in a corner of the lobby for a long time and stroked his chin thoughtfully. It might be necessary to get to this man in another way. How?

Slowly Jim Warren evolved an answer to the question that was tormenting him—slowly and reluctantly: Edna Tillinghast did understand that Lewis was a crook, but she didn't care! It didn't matter to her whether men were honest or dishonest! No other conclusion was possible. She was not a fool. What if she hadn't read his charges against Lewis? It was impossible that she should not know of them. . . . She knew, all right! It didn't matter to her—that was all!

This question settled at last, there came an-

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other: What did it matter to him, Jim Warren, what she thought of Lewis' honesty or dishonesty? What business was it of his? She belonged to Lewis, didn't she? She was part of the price Tillinghast was paying for the honor of Lewis' support for governor, wasn't she? What did it matter to him, Jim Warren?

"Nothing," he told himself.

And a day or so later she appeared in the gallery of the House. Jim Warren happened to glance up and saw her there with Lewis. At the same instant she saw him and waved her handkerchief. He nodded. Lewis was with her, of course! But what did it matter to him, Jim Warren?

"Everything!"

Through the clouds of conjecture that had tormented him one isolated fact suddenly thrust its head. Whoever and whatever this girl was, he wanted her—honest or dishonest, arrogant or humble, rich or poor, he wanted

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her! It was elemental—the call of sex to sex. And, wanting her, he would have her. Nothing to the contrary ever occurred to him. At first she had awed him from the pinnacle of her social position. Awe changed to admiration; admiration had changed to the one thought of owning her. Lewis! Faugh! So much the worse for Lewis! But she was betrothed to Lewis! Well, what of it?

“The minute a man gets what he has wanted more than anything else in the world,” Jim Warren philosophized, “there’s something else he wants worse. I want her and, by the living God, I’ll have her!”

CHAPTER XX

CAUGHT IN THE TENTACLES

STRANGE thoughts grew out of Jim Warren's sudden determination — dishonest thoughts, envious thoughts. He put them all in the pot and boiled them together. They simmered down to this: Position and wealth were necessary to win her—and he had neither! Position he would win in this political game; money he could get, and all the more easily that she didn't care where it came from. He was here in a jungle of temptation. All he had to do was to reach out both hands and pick hundred-dollar bills from every bush and vine. The Committee on Public Structures was a harvest to be garnered—and he was chairman! Then Railroads, too!

The big idea? He shook his head impa-

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tiently as it recurred to him. A quixotic thing, anyway! But the sealed packet in the safe deposit vault? Perfectly simple. Let it remain there. Nobody knew it was in existence save the people in the bank—and not one person knew what was in it save himself. Let it stay there and rot! With money, he could buy the smiles that were now given to Lewis. It seemed strange that after all his plans the one thing he wanted most in all the world—Edna Tillinghast—would be possible to him only by dishonesty! It was not fit that it should be so—but so be it!

It happened a day or so later that Tyson dropped down at the table where Jim Warren was at luncheon. Jim Warren looked him over thoughtfully. His face and neck were fat and pudgy and coarse; an enormous diamond glittered on one of his thick fingers; another flashed in his tie.

"Tyson," asked Jim Warren curiously, "how many years have you been up here?"

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"Six. Why?"

"What was your business?"

"Liquor."

"You've made a fairly good thing of this job, haven't you?—that is, you're well-to-do now."

Tyson flicked the ashes from his cigar into the salad dish and turned his small eyes upon Jim Warren keenly. He had an uncomfortable suspicion that Jim Warren was honest—and being honest he was not a fit person to confide in. Then, too, there was something in his manner, in his quick, short questions, in the steadiness of his cerulean gaze, that disconcerted him.

"What's the answer?" he inquired.

"I was merely curious—that's all," Jim Warren explained. "Everybody in the capitol seems to be very prosperous except me. I was wondering how they managed it. I gave up two thousand a year to come here at eight hundred. You get just what I do, yet you live at

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a big hotel, with a suite of rooms and a valet, and an automobile and a chauffeur. Are you still in the liquor business?"

"No," said Tyson. "I'm interested in—in two or three little things that—er—" He stopped.

"On the level now, Tyson—between man and man," Jim Warren urged. "Just because I was elected to this legislature as a labor man and a reformer, there seems to be a popular impression that I'm here for my health. You didn't come here for your health, did you?"

"Well—not exactly."

"What's the answer?"

Tyson rolled his cigar around in his rosebud mouth and his piggy eyes were blazing with curiosity. Finally he said:

"Warren, they tell me that you did hand Franques an awful wallop down in Warburton?"

"I did. I used him as far as he was useful, then passed him up."

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"You know you can't do that in politics—but once."

"Why not?"

"Because you won't get a second opportunity. Everybody up here knows about it. Even if it was in anybody's way to—to—well, to slip you something he'd be afraid to." He smoked on. "I'm not saying that anybody ever does slip anybody anything up here, you understand?"

"Oh, no!" Jim Warren pondered the matter all the way through the entrée. "Did it ever occur to you why I turned down Franques?"

Tyson shook his head.

"He had deliberately betrayed Lewis; I didn't know what he might do to me."

After a moment Tyson rose languidly and strolled out. At the door he turned as if to come back, but changed his mind.

That night it was that Lewis dropped in on Jim Warren again in the wretched, smelly

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lodging-house in the dingy side street. Apparently he had just come up to talk over a few things—the fight that would begin in Public Structures next day on the various bills that were intended to promote the political well-being of Dwight Tillinghast. He talked on for an hour or so without having said anything in particular, after which he rose to go.

“You won’t mind, Warren, if I’m frank with you about one or two matters, will you?” he asked hesitatingly.

“Not at all,” said Jim Warren. “Go ahead.”

“You know—you know you’re a big man up here, Warren,” Lewis went on in the same tone. “You’re chairman of a big committee and a member of another big committee. You are as close to Tillinghast and myself as anybody else in the chamber—perhaps closer; and it occurs to me that—well, that you ought to be more decently situated than you are—away out here.”

With a deprecatory movement of his hands

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he indicated the room and its furnishings. Jim Warren looked about curiously, as if it were all strange to him. At last his sky-blue eyes met Lewis'.

"I'm a poor man, Lewis," he said simply. "I told you once before."

"But, really," Lewis expostulated, "you ought to be better situated than this. It's an injustice not only to yourself but to your constituents. Suppose Warburton should send a delegation up here and they should—" He spread his hands again in a gesture.

"Can't help it," said Jim Warren.

Lewis scrutinized his gray suede gloves for a moment in silence.

"Pardon me; I don't want to suggest the indelicate thing, but if I could be of any assistance to you?" he questioned. "If you happened to be short of funds at the moment—"

"So soon!" Jim Warren grinned.

"Only a trifling loan?" Lewis urged blandly.

"The representative of a great district like

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Warburton shouldn't be hidden away in a hole like this." He paused. "A thousand or so and your note for a year."

Jim Warren turned away from him abruptly and stood at the window idly snapping his fingers. Below was Lewis' automobile, purring patiently.

"I might not be able to repay you at the end of the year," he said at last, without looking around.

"Two years, then—five years!" Lewis suggested generously. "That doesn't matter, really. Don't let it disturb you for a moment."

Jim Warren whirled around; Lewis dodged.

"Don't tempt me, Lewis," he pleaded, almost bitterly. "I don't love poverty for poverty's sake. I know I shouldn't be here, but I can't afford anything else. I saved a bit of my salary, it's true; but—"

"It just happens that I have a blank note in my pocket," Lewis interrupted courteously.

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He dropped down at the pine table that served Jim Warren for a desk. "Say, fifteen hundred? That will make you comfortable for a few weeks; and after that, if I can do anything else—"

Dumbly Jim Warren looked on as Lewis filled in the note. There was a little mercenary glint in his eyes as Lewis counted out fifteen one-hundred-dollar bills and laid them on the table.

Jim Warren put his hands behind his back.

"What have I got to do for that?" he demanded abruptly.

"There you go again," Lewis reproved pleasantly. "Nothing, of course; absolutely nothing, except sign this note. It isn't a bribe; it's a loan."

For half a minute Jim Warren merely stared at him, stared until Lewis began to fear that he had been precipitate; and the weird thought entered his head that perhaps this man was honest! Jim Warren sat down and signed

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the note. Lewis tucked it away in his pocket-book. . . . After a while the door opened and closed—and he was gone.

“I think, maybe, I’ve got you where I want you now, Mr. Warren!” he exclaimed exultantly as he made his way down the dim stairs. “Just so much as a whimper out of you, and—”

Jim Warren stood perfectly still until the automobile below bellowed and moved away. Then he grinned.

“At last,” he said, “I’m a regular politician. I’ve been bribed—and everything.” His eyes grew steely; he was thinking of Her. “Lewis, I’m sorry for you!”

On the following morning Jim Warren opened an account at the Sandringham National Bank with a deposit of fifteen hundred dollars.

CHAPTER XXI

REALIZATION

“**T**HEY don’t shoot members of the legislature!” Edna pondered that absurd statement for days, vaguely conscious that back of it lay an accusation of—of—dishonesty?—that at least—against Francis Everard Lewis, whose name she was to bear; to whom her hand was pledged. Finally she came to see that Jim Warren had meant that he, Lewis, was morally on a level with a traitor who sold his country. Complete realization made her face go scarlet with anger! It was contemptible! She despised innuendos. And this from Jim Warren after Lewis, believing in him, had made him what he was! Not only was Jim Warren ungrateful, but, knowing of her betrothal to Lewis, he had sought to sow the seed that would destroy her faith in him.

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In the beginning she had fallen under the influence of that strange, intangible quality that won men to Jim Warren. She had felt it that first day she saw him—that day in the bank when he had looked so ridiculously in earnest, pirouetting around after that silly little dog. She had felt it still more at her next meeting with him—the day her automobile had broken down. There was a comforting sense of power about him, a quaint frankness, an odd, boyish twist of mind that belied the real man. She was glad that at last he had lifted his mask and bared his envious, cowardly soul. That was the end, of course; she would despise him. For a time this thought satisfied her. Imperiously she denied vague questionings of her conscience.

Having resolved never to permit Jim Warren to intrude upon the serenity of her mind again, she found him constantly in her thoughts—but only that she might hate him, she told herself arrogantly. She found his name always be-

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fore her in the daily press—and his photograph. The day following his appointment as chairman of the Committee on Public Structures she met those whimsical eyes, that half-smiling mouth, in every newspaper she picked up. She flung them down rebelliously.

Women are hopelessly illogical—that's why they are women; also, perhaps—this is a platitude—that's why we love them. No man can love an adding machine. Edna, being a woman, was as illogical as the rest of them. So it was that one afternoon, despite her promise to her father, she hauled down a great scrapbook in which an obliging press-clipping bureau had garnered newspaper and magazine articles that had to do with her father's political career and with Lewis'. Here was Jim Warren's fight against Lewis from beginning to end. She read it guiltily, with tense interest—all of it, from Jim Warren's first flippant declaration that he would make Lewis climb a tree and pull the tree up after him, down to the

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incident of the fifty-thousand-dollar note, and that fateful interview which Jim Warren had made a matter of record on a phonograph.

Slowly, as she read, the color ebbed from her face. Had she been blind not to have understood all this before? Where was Lewis' denial? There was none; he had made no denial. Smilingly he had told her that denials of charges like these in the great game of politics was a mere waste of time. It had sounded plausible enough then, but these things cried for denial. Her father, too, had casually pointed out that all men in politics were liable to bitter and violent attacks and advised her to pay no heed to comments in the press. That might be all right in some cases; but this—this— Her father! Was he, too, dishonest? He knew of all this! And yet he was blind to it! Blind to it because of his ambition!

She sat staring blankly at the pages for a long, long time. Finally she flung herself



"And bribery is a crime?" she went on



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across the bed and wept. That night, mouse-like, she crept into the great library where her father sat gazing thoughtfully into the open fire and dropped on the floor at his knee. He placed a caressing arm about her shoulders.

"Father," she queried after a little, in a hard, strained voice, "if a man who holds public office accepts money from—well, from any one—a corporation, say—in return for his vote and influence in that office, it is bribery—isn't it?"

"Certainly," her father responded readily. He was immersed in a rosy glamour of contemplation, planning the things he would do when he was governor.

"And bribery is a crime?" she went on.

"Yes. It's a penal offense either to give or accept a bribe."

"It is dishonesty? Treason, even?"

"Yes"—absently.

"They send men to jail for it?"

"If they catch them."

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A long, long silence.

"Somehow I didn't understand it that way," Edna said wearily at last. "It had never occurred to me that one was not rightfully entitled to what one might earn by advancing the interests of a corporation, say, with which he might be connected."

"As you state it, one is entitled to what one may earn." Tillinghast took the trouble to explain. "But if one holds public office, and sells his vote and influence to a corporation, it is bribery."

Another long silence.

"Of course," she said faintly, at last, "that makes it impossible."

"Makes what impossible?"

"My marriage to Mr. Lewis"—simply.

Startled out of his sensuous contemplation of power, Tillinghast straightened up suddenly and looked amazed into the white face of his daughter.

"How!—why!—what are you talking about,

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my dear?" he demanded. His words fairly tripped over one another.

"Just what I say." She didn't even look up. "I can't marry a criminal; you wouldn't have me marry one. I never understood before. From what Mr. Lewis said—"

"Lewis a criminal!" her father broke in, aghast. "My dear daughter, what is the matter with you?"

"He *is* a criminal, isn't he? He *did* sell his vote and influence to a corporation while he held public office, didn't he? He *has* given and accepted bribes, hasn't he? He's grown rich and powerful from nothing just as Mr. Warren charged, hasn't he? He *did* offer Mr. Warren twenty-five thousand dollars not to run, didn't he?"

Chaos was come. That fat, benignant-looking hypocrite, Dwight Tillinghast, breathed heavily through his nose as he looked upon it.

"What's the matter with you?" he repeated helplessly.

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"Nothing, except that I've come to understand some things that I didn't understand before."

"Sold his vote and influence—" he began.

"For fifty thousand dollars!" Edna interrupted unemotionally.

"That note, you mean? Why, Edna, you amaze me! That was merely a loan."

"A loan made four years ago by a corporation to a man who held public office—a loan that never was repaid. Mr. Lewis had nothing to offer in return for that loan except his vote and influence, had he?"

"A loan, nevertheless," her father exploded suddenly. "You are talking about things you don't understand."

The girl rose and stood facing her father. There was no trace of emotion in her manner; no sign of perturbation—save that she was deadly white.

"Of course, it's impossible," she said coldly. "I shall tell him so next time he calls. I have

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been placed in a false position in the eyes of the world—in the eyes of Mr. Warren. Every one knew who and what Mr. Lewis was except myself. I—”

Tillinghast came to his feet ponderously.

“Edna, you don’t know what you are doing!” he exclaimed pleadingly. “My candidacy for governor, my child. If Lewis withdraws his support—and he will if you do this—I am lost. You must marry him!”

“Must!” she repeated quietly, very quietly. “My own father tells me that I must marry a traitor, a thief, to further his political ambition!”

“It isn’t that, Edna,” the honorable speaker whined. “Mr. Lewis is an honest gentleman. You don’t understand!” Her eyes met his placidly. “If he withdraws his support—”

“I will not marry him!” It was final. She turned and passed out the door.

CHAPTER XXII

JIM WARREN, GRAFTER

IT was a strange metamorphosis that was worked in Jim Warren by that fifteen hundred dollars. He had never known luxury, he had never craved it; but now he would have just fifteen hundred dollars' worth of it. If it panned out he would have more; if it didn't—in that event his plans were unsettled. Fifteen hundred dollars wouldn't last long, but there was more where that came from and when that source was exhausted there were a thousand others. So it came to pass that Jim Warren moved out of that dingy house in that dingy side street, where he had been quartered at six dollars a week, into a suite of apartments adjoining those of Representative Tyson in a down-town hotel, at one hundred dollars a week. The sensation of physical comfort fol-

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lowing the change was pleasant—most pleasant.

Within a week or so Jim Warren had become a part of the gay life of the capital. He spent money like a drunken sailor—luncheons, dinners, wines, theater parties, hired automobiles; all were his, along with other essentially luxurious things. He reserved a special table in the café and there was always to be found a choice collection of men of Tyson's type. Some of them were members of the legislature, some of them lobbyists, some of them were political panhandlers—all of them were grafters.

Lewis looked upon it all and smiled.

"Gad! He's going in with both feet," he remarked to himself cheerfully. "He'll strike bottom pretty soon. I wonder how he'll explain this to his constituents?"

Tyson didn't quite understand it, but he had his suspicions. Passing Jim Warren in the hall one day, he winked solemnly and inquired:

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"You've found the key, eh?"

"What key?" asked Jim Warren.

"The key to prosperity."

Jim Warren laughed oddly.

"I smashed in the door." He was passing on when a sudden thought occurred to him. "Sometime, when you have half an hour, Tyson, I'd like to talk with you."

"There's no time like the present," Tyson responded. "Come on in."

He led Jim Warren into his own apartments and for ten minutes they talked of everything in the world except the one thing Jim Warren wanted to talk of. Obviously he didn't quite know how to get at it.

"Spit it out," Tyson invited cordially. There was a poker game in abeyance down the hall. "What's eating you?"

"It's this matter of money again," Jim Warren said bluntly. He felt the blood rush to his face. "You know I told you once before that I wasn't up here for my health, no more than

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you are. Now—let me in. I've got two big committees over here and I've got certain powers in those committees. How should I proceed to realize on them? You know I'm an amateur."

Tyson laughed.

"Oh, it's easy enough to get if you're out for that sort of thing," he remarked carelessly.

"But how?" Jim Warren insisted.

"You're a member of Railroads, aren't you?"

Jim Warren nodded.

"It would be worth while to two or three of the railroads who have bills coming up this session to slip you something on suspicion," Tyson went on. "It never does a railroad harm to make friends among the people who can do things for 'em. In this case it would be a sort of retaining fee."

"I think I see," said Jim Warren slowly.

"Just drop a casual hint some day in the lobby in the presence of the right man," Tyson

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went on. "You'll find coin sticking in your coat-tail pockets before you can get home." He laughed again. "Don't ask me how it will get there—I don't know."

For a long time Jim Warren sat, with his sinewy fingers interlaced, staring at Tyson.

"I'm chairman of Public Structures," he remarked irrelevantly.

"I was coming to that," said Tyson. He leaned forward and tapped Jim Warren's hand with one pudgy finger. "Now, Warren, you know and I know that those bills I put in for Tillinghast—those recreation-pier bills and the rest of 'em—haven't a chance to pass. You're making the fight for them and it isn't doing you any harm in that end of the state any more than it is doing Tillinghast harm; but we know, all of us, that they won't pass. However, there are a whole lot of contractors and steel men, and people to whom that work would have to go if the bills did pass, who don't know that they haven't a chance. I dare say one or two of

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those fellows would be delighted to pass over something just to know that you are on their side. As chairman of Public Structures—don't you see?"

Again Jim Warren was silent for a long time.

"And Lewis would come across again without a murmur if you put it to him," Tyson went on.

"Lewis!" exclaimed Jim Warren. "How did you know that—"

"He's made no secret of it," Tyson informed him cheerfully. He told the lie glibly. It was a guess and it had gone home. "He's put a few of us wise."

Lewis! The bare mention of the name brought a flush of anger to Jim Warren's face. Some day there would come a reckoning with Lewis. His steel-like fingers gripped in his palms.

"Well, say Lewis loosens up another thousand or so," he remarked; "say the railroads

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add a couple of thousand and the contractors and steel men still another thousand—what, after that?”

The piggy eyes of Representative Tyson grew large in his astonishment.

“Holy Moses! What do you want?” he exclaimed. “That’s a fine lot of pickings for a first-year man—an amateur.”

Jim Warren’s teeth closed with a snap.

“It’s a piker’s game,” he declared. “Do you imagine that three or four or five thousand dollars is of any use to me? It’s the big game I’m after. That’s cigarette money.”

“You’d better get a piece of lead pipe and go into it right,” Tyson advised. “I’m telling you how the game is worked. You wanted to know. Of course, if it’s too small for you, I’m sorry, but I can’t help it.”

Suddenly Jim Warren rose and paced the length of the apartment half a dozen times. Tyson glanced at his watch; the poker game was still waiting. Jim Warren stopped in front

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of him abruptly. There was an unpleasant lowering of his eyebrows, a hardening of his mouth, a narrowing of the sky-blue eyes, as he looked down on his fellow member.

"Why not play the big game, Tyson?" he demanded.

"Cough it up; let's hear it."

"There happens to be before the house now a bill that provides for the building of a public bridge across the arm of the ocean which cuts in toward the capital here—Sandringham," said Jim Warren.

Tyson nodded.

"The purpose of that bridge will be to shorten the present wagon-road that goes around the water. It will cut off about two miles."

Again Tyson nodded.

"The Q. & X. Railroad follows the wagon-road now. If they had a bridge across that arm of the sea it would cut two miles off their road and relieve them of the maintenance

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of two miles of railroad-bed that is built across the marshes. Do you follow me?"

"I know what you're talking about, yes."

"Well? Don't you see it?"

"See what?"

Jim Warren's calloused forefinger was thrust into Tyson's face; his eyes were ablaze.

"Don't you see, if there were a provision in that bill which would allow the railroad to use that bridge, it would ultimately save them the price of a bridge? They'll have to build one sooner or later."

Slowly Tyson's rosebud mouth dropped open in pleased astonishment; suddenly it closed.

"Oh, but you couldn't put that over." The dreamer was awake. "It's a fine young scheme, but—"

"You talk like an idiot, Tyson," Jim Warren declared in sudden impatience. "We wouldn't have to put anything over. All we would have to do would be to get an amendment with this provision in it tacked on to the

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bill. Then, when it came to committee—do you see now?”

“No,”—helplessly.

“I’m chairman of Public Structures—you are a member of Public Structures. The bill comes to us with that amendment tacked on. It would cost the Q. & X. just fifty thousand dollars for the committee to pass upon that bill, with the amendment, favorably. We don’t care what they do with it after it leaves the committee. It would simply cost that much to get it through the committee. Do you see now?”

The rotund Mr. Tyson saw suddenly; he went sheer white with pleased astonishment. The superb audacity of this Jim Warren benumbed him with delight. He rose, gasping, and whacked his fist on the table.

“And they’d do it!” he declared. He waved his fat hands in the air. “They’re easy down there anyway. If they saw a chance, even a remote chance, for that scheme to get by they’d

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do it. They'd fall for it. You're on! Oh, a pippin!"

A smile grew upon Jim Warren's face—a hard, unpleasant smile.

"Fifty thousand dollars!" he said. "Twenty-five thousand for me, ten for you, and the rest—split it up as you like."

"It would take months to do it, but it's worth it." Tyson's little soul fairly shriveled with envy of this gaunt, red-headed man, who rigged schemes like that out of the ambient air. "I'm with you!"

"Well, it's going to take some work—get on the job," Jim Warren directed curtly. "You know the ropes; I don't. You see, Tyson, this thing of holding up people for five hundred here, and a thousand there, and two thousand yonder, is a piker's game. I'll play the big game or not at all."

Tyson's exuberance fled as another thought came to him; his fat face grew grave.

"By the way," he queried, "do you happen

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to know that Franques would be the man we would have to deal with in Q. & X.? He did them some favor at some time; and after you passed him up they took him in."

"Well?" Jim Warren demanded belligerently. "Didn't I make a monkey of Franques once? I can do it again."

During the next four days Jim Warren's bank account grew some forty-five hundred dollars. Tyson's conjecture that the railroads and a few big contractors would drop a few crumbs in Jim Warren's hands just for the sake of making a friend of him, proved correct. . . . On the fifth day a messenger brought a note to Jim Warren's suite. He glanced at the superscription and it startled him; he opened the envelope with feverish fingers:

"MY DEAR MR. WARREN:

"At last I have come to see what you meant. I owe you a thousand apologies. Will you call

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to-morrow afternoon at four and allow me to make them in person?

“Sincerely,

“EDNA TILLINGHAST.”

Jim Warren was dazed a little; the words were jumbled together meaninglessly. After a long time the note fluttered to the floor, Jim Warren's eyes closed as though he were in pain and he dropped back limply into a chair, his face in his hands.

“God! What have I done!” he said.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GREAT CHANGE

WHITE and haggard and gaunt, Jim Warren stalked back and forth across the drawing-room as Edna talked. His hands were clenched savagely, his teeth crushed together. From time to time he turned flatly and looked down upon this woman with the misty eyes. She was apologizing to him; he owed the apologies, not she! Occasionally there was a little catch in her voice, a half sob, as she talked; then she recovered herself and went on bravely.

"There were days and days when I merely hated you for what you had said," she was saying in a low, tense voice. "I thought your innuendos were cowardly; I told you they were cowardly—and all the time you were merely

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trying to make me understand. I couldn't bring myself to believe that this man to whom I had given so much was anything but what I had pictured him in my own foolish dreams. When finally I did come to understand who he was and what he was"—she raised her moist eyes pleadingly—"you can imagine what it meant to me. Every shred of affection I had ever cherished for him died in that instant—the hate that I had directed toward you was turned upon him." She shuddered a little. "He had not only deceived me, lied to me, but he was a thief, a traitor, a criminal!"

Jim Warren strode toward her impetuously; she extended her hands defensively.

"Never mind all this," he said harshly. "It doesn't—"

"Please hear me to the end," she begged. "I suppose you knew that I was engaged to this man; and yet"—she spoke very softly—"it was hardly love, the feeling I had for him. It was rather admiration for what the man had

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done. I had no way of knowing—I didn't even dream of the manner in which he had gained his power. I only knew he had it; and woman is prone to worship the strong. Besides, he was going to make my father governor; he had already made him speaker." She paused suddenly and her limpid eyes reflected her agony and shame. "You understand, don't you?"

"I think I do." Again Jim Warren strode toward her; again she stopped him.

"When finally comprehension came," she continued in a strained, thin voice, "I went to my father and explained that the marriage would be—would be impossible."

A great gladness pulsed in Jim Warren's heart, softened the harshness of his face, melted the steeliness of his sky-blue eyes.

"The rest of it is ugly—ugly!" she said faintly.

"Please stop," Jim Warren urged.

"You know the ambition he has? He wants

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to be governor and after that United States senator? If I should break my pledge to Mr. —Mr.—him—it would mean that all his power would be directed against my father to defeat him. My father saw it instantly and pointed it out to me. He, too—my own father—had deceived me; but what could I do?” She stopped. Jim Warren started to say something. She went on hastily: “If my engagement were allowed to stand it would hold his support to my father.” Her face flamed suddenly. “You see I’m goods—I’m chattels—they’re bargaining with me!”

Jim Warren’s fingers closed and unclosed spasmodically. He would have given something, almost anything, at that instant to have had them about the fat neck of the honorable speaker.

“Finally I agreed to my father’s wishes—I could do nothing else,” Edna resumed. “The betrothal is to stand for the present, but I am going away—going away to-morrow, to be

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gone for months. I couldn't bear to remain here and live the lie that I should have to live. . . . I felt that I must make you understand before I go. I wanted you to know that I know who and what this man is. I want to apologize to you and I want to thank you." She sighed wearily. "That is all. You understand now?"

How trivial, how pitifully inconsequential it all was compared to the confession he—Jim Warren—had to make! She had believed in the man whom she was to marry. It was just and right that she should believe in him. But he, Jim Warren— He drew a chair up opposite to her and sat down, looking straight into her eyes.

"I want you to listen to me and I want you to understand every word I say," he commanded. He spoke rapidly, feverishly. "I want you to understand that it is I, and not you, who should make apologies."

She drew back a little, vaguely alarmed at

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the earnestness of his manner, at the directness of his gaze. He seemed not to notice.

"I went into this political game, or blundered into it, with a definite idea," he ran on monotonously. "That idea came before anything else, before it had ever occurred to me that it would be practicable to put it to the test. It was based on the exact knowledge that the political game, generally speaking, is played with marked cards. Why should not a clever man who was honest—that was the first requisite, honesty!—why should not a clever man who was honest step into the game, mark his cards to suit himself and play it out with them? In other words, bring himself down to their level, match them trick for trick, and go them one better! In the end it would all be, of course, for the sake of decency and honesty and the public good. There was a bare chance that such a thing could be done; and if it could be done it would purge the state capitol as no other thing in all the world would.

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"Lewis was the big boss in my end of the state. I went to see him in my effort to break in. I didn't see him, but I did see Franques, his henchman, and made a deal with him that fitted perfectly with the big idea. Briefly, he was to betray Lewis to me—and he did. Then, to clench the big idea, I deposited a sealed packet in a certain bank here in Sandringham. I was elected. I used Franques as long as he was useful to me, then dropped him. In political parlance, I double-crossed him. That act of ingratitude—and it was that, nothing else—was the first step toward the carrying out of the big idea. It was necessary and—and ugly, as you say."

He stopped and his voice dropped a little.

"Meanwhile our paths in life—yours and mine—crossed and recrossed; and for political reasons it was necessary for Lewis to be decent to me in spite of the fact that I had smashed his power in his own district. . . . Then I learned you were betrothed to him. . . .

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Why, I don't know—but I wanted to make you understand what manner of man he was; I didn't believe you knew. That was the day I offended you so grievously. During the days following that, when you were hating me, you were constantly in my thoughts. I was trying to decide for myself whether you knew or did not know what Lewis was. I couldn't reconcile your attitude with the bald fact that the newspapers had been full of Lewis' exposure. . . . It was a long time before I reached a conclusion."

"And that conclusion—was—" she queried softly.

"Forgive me," said Jim Warren. "That conclusion was that you did know, that you must know, who and what Lewis was; and the arrogance of wealth and power had made you callous to it. In other words, you knew and didn't care. Your attitude left me nothing else," he pleaded desperately in self-extenuation.

"Please go on," she said coldly.

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"You see you owed me no apology—I owed every apology to you. I'm glad you've given me the opportunity of making them."

"Your conclusion was inevitable," she remarked, "just as mine had been. I understand."

Jim Warren rose and again he stalked back and forth across the room. Would he go on? Would he tell her all of it? After a moment he dropped down in front of her again.

"I knew you belonged to another man," he began bluntly; "and when I asked myself why I had taken the trouble to try to make you understand what manner of man he was, there was no answer. After all, it was none of my business. I tried to make myself think that; I couldn't. Then, one day—the day you waved your handkerchief to me from the gallery—one day I knew. You were necessary to me; you were—"

"Please don't; please!" she cried despairingly.

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She extended her hands; he crumpled them in his own, like rose-leaves. Suddenly he let them go and rose.

"Whatever you were, honest or dishonest, I wanted you," he went on violently. "I was poor and without position. It was necessary to have both to win you. In that instant I think I must have gone mad. I forgot honor and honesty; I forgot my pledges to the boys at Warburton; I forgot the big idea; I forgot all else in the world but you. It would be easy to get money with the temptations about me; I could force myself into a position in the game I was playing; I—"

"You don't know what you are saying!" There was a sob in her voice. "You must not! You must not!"

"It was easy to get money," he continued relentlessly. "I started to get it. I got it. Here, there, everywhere, it was to be had for the stretching out of a hand." His voice suddenly softened. "I was going to win you from Lewis

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as Lewis had won you in the first place—by selling myself to the highest bidder, by crookedness, by thieving, by treason.”

Edna sank forward, with her head in her hands. She was moaning.

“I have no defense save that I loved you and wanted you,” Jim Warren went on very quietly. “Now, I’ve taken the step. I’m a crook like the rest of them. I have taken bribes. I’m all that I’ve ever said of any man.” He stopped, waiting for her to speak. “It seemed odd to me that the purest, sweetest thing of my life was to be won by dishonesty; but I didn’t hesitate.”

For a long time there was silence, broken only by the girl’s sobs. Jim Warren stood motionless, looking down upon the glory of her hair with drawn, white face. At last she struggled to her feet and faced him, her eyes swimming.

“You must,” and she laid a slender hand on his arm—“You must return all that has come

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to you dishonestly—you must play the game as you intended to play it.”

“You care, then?”

“Whether I care or not is of no consequence. Unwittingly I have caused you to become—become dishonest; now, for my sake, that you understand I am honest, you must be honest.”

Jim Warren passed one hand across his brow. “Play the game as you intended to play it!” she had said. Through the shame of it all he saw a way. The big idea! His path lay straight as the arrow flies! The sealed packet in the vault! As it all came to him—the way to save himself—his face cleared, and for a scant instant there was a suggestion of that haunting grin on his lips. “Play the game as he intended to play it!” Hang it, he would; he was playing it that way!

“And understand, please,” she was pleading in a small, weak voice, “that I am beyond your reach. I am still betrothed to another man. You must do all this yourself.”

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His blood flamed and swiftly his sinewy arms enfolded the shrinking figure. She struggled to free herself.

"I'll be honest," he said harshly. "I'll play the game as I intended to play it, but you must believe in me—come what will, happen what may, you must believe in me. Say you will! Say you will!"

"I will," she promised.

For an instant she lay there quiescent, overcome by the violence of this man; and a thrill of peace and content passed over her.

Jim Warren, going down the front steps, met Lewis coming up.

"Hello!" Jim Warren greeted bruskiy.

Lewis nodded and stood motionless on the steps until the sturdy figure of the maker of plows vanished around the corner. Then he rang the bell.

CHAPTER XXIV

BIG STAKES

WHATEVER ideas of honesty and loyalty to the trust of his constituents may have been knocking about in Jim Warren's head, they were not in evidence during the next two months. Instead, with the faithful Tyson at his elbow, he was going around with his hand out. The old-time grin had returned to his face and settled apparently for a long stay. There was a gouge here, and a holdup there, and the diplomatic turning of a doubtful trick yonder. Tyson's function was to supply expert advice as to where it was to be had; Jim Warren furnished the boldness and audacity necessary to get it. Tyson was never so scared and pleased in his life as he was during these two months. He didn't know there was so much

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money in the world. And the big trick was yet to come—the deal with the Q. & X. Railroad for that bridge privilege. It was shaping up nicely.

Rumors of corruption in the legislature flew thick and fast—and Jim Warren's name always led all the rest. At last it came to be an open secret that he would take anything that wasn't nailed down. He proved that late one afternoon when he strolled unannounced into a committee-room where four men were busily engaged in counting money. They thought the door was locked.

"Hello, boys!" Jim Warren greeted cheerily. "Cutting up something? Don't I get in?"

It wasn't Jim Warren's committee, and he had nothing to do with any bill that had come or might come before it, but he picked up a couple of hundred there. Lewis heard of it and grinned. This red-headed paragon of virtue was a wizard when it came to getting his share; and every dollar he took placed him more

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surely in Lewis' grip. Meanwhile he had no complaint, because Jim Warren was living up to his compact so far as the fight in the Public Structures, which had for its ultimate purpose the strengthening of Tillinghast in the doubtful end of the state, was concerned. Those bills for recreation piers and the rest of it had been jammed in as a political move; and here was a man who had fought for them so hard and so consistently that now they stood, at least, a bare chance of passing. All of which reflected great glory upon his own puppet, Tillinghast.

Jim Warren was sitting alone at his private table in the hotel café late one afternoon, when Tyson came in hurriedly. Victory was written all over his fat face. Intuitively Jim Warren knew what it meant—the Q. & X. had fallen for the big deal—the money was in sight. Tyson sat down.

"We put it over," he ejaculated in a hoarse whisper.

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"Good. Franques came to see it our way, eh?"

"I told him we were ready to report on the bridge bill when the—er—" Tyson made a motion of counting money. "And that will be to-morrow morning at ten o'clock."

"Where?"

"In your rooms—here."

That was all that was said about it. After a while Jim Warren glanced at the calendar. June third, it said.

"By the way," he queried carelessly, "what date are the primaries to elect delegates to the state convention?"

"July twenty-first," Tyson replied. "That'll be about two weeks after the session closes." He tapped Jim Warren on the wrist meaningly. "You've done an awful lot for Tillinghast. It'll be a walk-over for him. It just occurs to me that he might stand for a little—er—touch?"

"Forget it," said Jim Warren.

Properly abashed, and recognizing the pres-

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ence of a superior mind, Tyson dropped the subject. He went back to Franques.

"Do you know, I'm surprised that Franques hasn't got it in for you good and plenty?" he remarked. "Instead of being sore at the way you double-crossed him, he's mild as milk."

Jim Warren leaned back in his chair and stared at Tyson steadily through the cloud of cigar smoke.

"He's framing up something to hand me," he remarked; "but don't let it disturb you—he won't get away with it." He scribbled his name on the check. "And don't let that idea that Tillinghast will have a walk-over in the state convention run away with you. He won't even be a candidate before that convention."

"He won't—what!" exclaimed Tyson.

"You may bet all the money you want on that at any odds you like," Jim Warren assured him with a yawn. "He hasn't a chance in the world."

While Jim Warren made his way to his

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rooms Tyson sat still and did some heavy thinking. Once in his rooms, Jim Warren crashed the door to behind him and locked it, after which he flung his cigar away and dropped into an arm-chair.

"How tired I am of it all!" he exclaimed suddenly. "It seems to me I haven't drawn a clean breath in generations." Then evidently the tenor of his thoughts changed, for his eyes softened and he smiled a little. "She'll be coming back soon."

There was a look of grave concern on Jim Warren's freckled face an hour or so later as he went up the steps of Dwight Tillinghast's home. The speaker received him effusively.

"I've come up here, Tillinghast, to do you a favor," Jim Warren began abruptly. "I don't know just how you're going to take it."

"Do me a favor?" Tillinghast repeated, puzzled.

"You remember, when you first approached me in this matter of your candidacy for gov-

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ernor," Jim Warren continued, "I told you I'd just as soon see you governor as any man I knew, except myself."

"I remember, yes. An excellent joke!"

"Now, I'm going to ask you—I'm going to beg of you—not to be a candidate before the state convention."

Tillinghast's puffy eyes grew wide and wider; the color rushed to his face, then ebbed away.

"Not be a candidate! Not be a candidate!" he blustered. "Not be a candidate! Why?"

"Because," and Jim Warren's voice was perfectly level and calm, "I'm going to be a candidate, and I want to save you from the ignominy of defeat."

The speaker's fat lips shook with the torrent of words that rushed up for utterance.

"If you'll listen to me just a minute," Jim Warren continued in the same quiet tone, "I'll say all I have to say, and you can think it over at your leisure. I'd hate to have to beat you

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and I would beat you—I can beat any man—and there are other reasons”—a pair of limpid eyes swam across his inner vision—“other reasons you don’t know, which make me want to let you out gracefully—in other words, permit you to withdraw your name now. I won’t undertake to explain; I’m merely telling you the facts.”

The words came then, a torrent of them, disjointed, sputtering, incoherent. After the first rush they took form. Invectives there were and charges of grafting, and threats of exposure. Jim Warren, with no trace of emotion, listened to the end.

“I was afraid,” he said regretfully, “that you wouldn’t understand. Believe me”—he was quite in earnest—“I’m trying to do you a favor.”

Sharp at ten o’clock Franques came in. He remained in Jim Warren’s rooms for three-quarters of an hour, then went away with his

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evil eyes agleam and his thin, pale lips writhing in a smile. In an inner pocket he carried Jim Warren's receipt for fifty thousand dollars! His lank, dusty-looking figure had barely vanished down the hall when Tyson, eager and greedy, came in.

"Did you get it?" he demanded breathlessly.

"Yes. Now, look here, Tyson," and there was a commanding, businesslike note in Jim Warren's voice; "listen to me just a minute. This is your cue to get out, vamoose, skip, disappear. I got it all right, but if I'm not wrong, I'll be in the hands of the police before night. I'm letting you out because you have made many things possible for me; now vanish!"

Tyson stared at him in bewilderment.

"What're you trying to do—bilk me?" he demanded rebelliously.

"I'm trying to keep you out of jail! The police, man! Don't you see? It's all been a big scheme! There'll be hell to pay before the day's over!"

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Fright laid hold of the heels of Representative Tyson suddenly and he fell to running with all his might. Jim Warren sped down the stairs and leaped into a taxicab.

"Sandringham National Bank—quick!" he commanded.

It was shortly after eleven o'clock when Jim Warren strolled into the legislative chamber and, after one look around, went on to the committee-room. The explosion would come there. He dropped into a chair and was sitting drumming idly on the long table when the door was thrown open violently and Lewis came in.

"Hello, Lewis!" he greeted. "I was waiting for you."

For a moment Lewis hovered around the door, glaring at him; then, by an effort, he regained control of himself. When he spoke it was a sort of purring, with a dangerous undertone.

"Tillinghast called me up last night and told me of his little conversation with you," he said.

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"Yes?"

"You will not be a candidate for governor and you will support Tillinghast!"

"Your statement is slightly twisted," Jim Warren taunted. "I will be a candidate for governor and I will not support Tillinghast."

"In your campaign against me, Warren, you took particular pains to identify me with the interests; you stamped it upon the public mind and burned it in." Lewis was sneering. "It was a job well done. That stamp is ineradicable."

"It is." Jim Warren grinned.

"You made a dirty campaign of it and won as an honest man."

"I did."

"And in the last two or three months you've been grafting right and left. The first man you took a bribe from was this very man whom you had stamped with the mark of the beast—myself!"

"Yes."

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"You got money from me on three occasions and you signed a note each time! Now do you understand why you will not be a candidate for governor?"

"You mean you'll make the notes public? Give them to the newspapers?"

"I mean just that—and don't think that any idea of saving myself will stop me. I coaxed you into taking that first money just to get this grip on you. You have been tricky, Warren—I'll meet you, trick for trick!"

For some reason, which was not apparent, Jim Warren seemed seized of a sudden desire to laugh.

"And you're determined to make those notes public if I insist on being a candidate?" he queried.

"I am."

"Have you got 'em with you?"

"I have."

"Excuse me just a second, won't you?" Jim Warren stepped outside the door; reappearing

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almost immediately. "Now, if you'll wait just a moment, please," he requested courteously.

He sat down and began drumming on the table again. Lewis regarded him in silence—a silence he couldn't have explained. Two, three minutes passed; and then came a hurried shuffling of feet outside the door.

"Now, Lewis, you'll *have* to make those notes public," Jim Warren declared. "I'm still a candidate."

Came a knock at the door; Lewis started.

"Who is that?" he demanded nervously.

"The newspaper men," said Jim Warren. "Come in, boys."

They came in, a dozen of them, staring curiously—first at Jim Warren, then at Lewis, suddenly gone white.

"Lock the door, boys," Jim Warren directed. "Some one might want to come in—or go out. Mr. Lewis has a few words to say to you." He turned upon him. "Or shall I?"

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"Are you mad, man? Are you mad?" That was all.

"I'll say it for him," the maker of plows volunteered. "It isn't necessary for me to tell you boys how I whaled the life out of Lewis to come here. That's history—you all know it. My platform consisted of one word—Honesty. Lewis is the accredited representative of the combined interests. Now he is pleased to say that on three separate and distinct occasions he has bribed me. Further, he has certain notes in his pockets with which he undertakes to prove that he bribed me. He suggested that he would like to give this matter to the newspapers, and I sent for you. I dare say he'll be glad to produce the notes?"

Stripped of the veneer that covered his sordid nakedness, taunted, mocked, bullyragged, Lewis sprang to his feet, his face purple.

"So help me God, Jim Warren, I'll send you to jail if it's the last thing I ever do!" he

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shouted. "Yes, I have the notes. Here they are. Take 'em; read 'em. Get a line on the particular brand of honesty this man deals in."

Twelve reporters fell upon those three slips of paper and twenty-four eyes devoured them.

"Of course you deny that you signed these?" one of the reporters asked of Jim Warren.

"No; I don't deny it," he replied in a tone of surprise. "I did sign 'em. That's my signature. I got the money. He bribed me."

"Then what—" The press collectively scratched its head in perplexity.

Came another knocking at the door. Jim Warren addressed the newspaper man nearest the door:

"Will you please let in Mr. Franques and the officer with him?"

"Officer!" Lewis was chalky white.

"For me—not you," said Jim Warren.

The door swung back and Franques, his swarthy face contorted by malignant hate, came into the room. Behind him was a plain-

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clothes man. Franques thrust a claw-like finger in Jim Warren's face.

"James Palmer Warren," said the officer, "I arrest you on the specific charge of accepting a bribe of fifty thousand dollars from one Franques."

Twelve live newspaper men showed an uneasy disposition to fly.

"Just a minute, boys," Jim Warren requested pleasantly. "I want to ask you to go by the Sandringham National Bank with us." He grinned. "Take my word for it, boys, this story hasn't started yet."

CHAPTER XXV

THE BIG IDEA

IT was a strange gathering in the sturdy steel-barred vaults of the Sandringham National Bank. A dozen reporters there were; and Jim Warren, the maker of plows; and Francis Everard Lewis, and Franques, erstwhile his henchman; and the plain-clothes man; and President Chisholm of the bank, with those two clerks whose affidavits had been attached to the sealed packet at the time it was placed in Box 1313. Lewis' liver had turned white within him—the craven had come through; Franques was as inscrutable as marble; the reporters keen, eager, tense—and Jim Warren, pallid, but calm, assured and grinning. As for the plain-clothes man, the delay annoyed him. He hadn't wanted to come by here, anyway;

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and if these people were going to stop all day and gab, he might miss the ball game.

Jim Warren was self-appointed master of ceremonies.

"Mr. Chisholm," he requested, "will you please state the conditions under which Box 1313, which is held in my name, may be opened?"

Mr. Chisholm recited the whole rigmarole and produced his copy of the written agreement.

"That agreement has never been violated?" Jim Warren asked.

"It has not been, certainly," was the reply. "You have the only key to the box and you have never been inside the vault except with these two witnesses and myself." He indicated the clerks.

Jim Warren produced the key and thrust it into the lock. There was a sharp click as he turned it once; then, with his hand on the knob, he faced the huddled group.

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"We're going to make some political history now," he remarked. "It will be mighty unpleasant, but history, nevertheless."

He pulled the door open. There was a craning of necks to see what the box contained. Seemingly there were only a dozen or more long envelopes; no, two dozen, three dozen—each sealed and numbered. Jim Warren stood aside and took a note-book from his pocket.

"Now, officer," he requested, "will you take out those envelopes, one at a time, and give me the numbers, please?"

The plain-clothes man thrust in a red, hairy hand and brought forth the first packet—a bulky one.

"Number thirty-nine," he read.

Jim Warren consulted his note-book.

"Number thirty-nine," he repeated. "Fifty thousand dollars in marked five-hundred-dollar bills, paid to me by one Franques, as agent of the Q. & X. Railroad, to be divided in the Committee on Public Structures to secure a

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favorable report on an amendment that gives the Q. & X. the right to run its trains across a public bridge. Now, officer, please tear off the outer envelope, and inside you will find another with affidavits of Mr. Chisholm here, and these two clerks, showing that the packet was deposited in that box less than two hours ago."

The officer obeyed dumbly. Inside, everything was according to specifications. With nervous fingers he ripped open the inner envelope. Money, money, money! His eyes bulged at the yellowbacks of it. He had never before seen fifty thousand dollars all at once.

"Count the money and keep that and all the envelopes, officer," Jim Warren directed. "You will need them for evidence. Now the next one."

Again the officer thrust in his hand.

"Number thirty-eight," he called.

"Seven hundred and fifty dollars; my share of three thousand dollars paid to Dalrymple, Matthews, Tyson and myself, as members of

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Public Structures, for reporting favorably a bill for cement work on the docks in the lower basin," Jim Warren read. "The next, please."

"Number thirty-seven."

"Two thousand dollars; my share of ten thousand dollars paid to Weston, Blakely, Chester and Hall, of the Committee on Railroads, in consideration of an adverse report on a street railway franchise that would have been a competing line." He read it off glibly.

"Number Thirty-six."

"Two hundred and fifty dollars; my share of fifteen thousand dollars paid to sixty members of the House for the defeat of the pure milk bill. In the inner envelope you'll find a list of the men who accepted the bribe along with me."

The plain-clothes man drew out the list and scanned it. There was a unanimous movement of the reporters in his direction. He thrust the list into a pocket.

"The district attorney first," he said.

It was a grateful break in the silence of won-

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der that had fallen upon the group. Jim Warren glanced at the reporters, nodded and smiled; they understood. Then his sky-blue eyes traveled over all reflectively. Lewis, white to the gills, was merely gazing at him dumbly, fascinated; Franques' beady eyes were impenetrable; President Chisholm was standing with his mouth half open—staring, staring. Only the reporters were keenly alive, alert—the reporters and Jim Warren. Some of them had already exhausted their note-paper and were scribbling on their cuffs. Jim Warren tore out the back of his book and distributed it among them.

So the roll-call went on—that roll-call of shame. Names that had never been touched by the breath of scandal were here; and always, ever recurrent like the tolling of a bell, was the name of Tyson. The nervous tension broke at last; the mere mention of Tyson brought a snicker, a laugh, a hysterical guffaw. Oddly, it occurred to Jim Warren that these men were

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going mad about him. There was nothing, nobody, left for them to believe in. For the first time there came a doubt as to the wisdom of this thing he had done. He, himself, hadn't realized the sweeping dishonor he had brought upon his state. Rotten it was—yes, he had known that; but this—this— He gritted his teeth; the work went on.

"Twenty-seven," said the plain-clothes officer at last.

"Please lay that aside," Jim Warren requested.

"Ain't you going to open it?"

"I am—at the proper time."

He turned deliberately and his eyes lingered on Lewis' face for a scant instant. Again, when number nine was called he asked that that be laid aside, and for the second time he glanced at Lewis. Finally came number one, and there remained in the box just one other packet—a long, legal-looking envelope which seemed to contain only a single sheet of paper.

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Jim Warren took number one and turned upon Lewis savagely.

"You started it all, Lewis," he exclaimed passionately. "Number one is yours—your original fifteen hundred dollars; and here is your next—one thousand." He picked up envelope number nine. "And your next—one thousand." He picked up number twenty-seven, and ripped the three of them open feverishly. Bills came out and crackled in his fingers. "Here's your filthy money, Lewis, every cent of it!"—and he flung it straight into the ashen face before him. Deliberately, with eyes fixed upon Lewis', he tore the three envelopes to bits and they dribbled down at his feet. "You're safe so far as I am concerned. I can't appear against you. I'm going to let you out for the sake of a woman who believed in you."

Lewis stooped and mechanically began to gather up the bills from the floor. Jim Warren took a step forward and stood looking down

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upon him with clenched fists upraised. The plain-clothes man stopped him with a gesture. Quite himself again, Jim Warren turned to the reporters.

"To summarize, gentlemen," he said quietly, "I have been in the legislature about six months; and in that time there has been paid to me in the form of bribes and considerations of various sorts a sum total of about eighty-two thousand dollars. This, of course, includes the fifty thousand dollars paid to me this morning by Franques here. That was never intended as a bribe. It was a trap; every bill was marked. Franques set the trap; I carefully arranged that he might do it. It's a little personal matter between us—eh, Franques?" There was no answer. "Eight-two thousand dollars, gentlemen," Jim Warren continued reflectively; "and that is only a part of the graft of this session. Altogether, seventy-one members out of a total of two hundred and forty-eight are implicated. Their names are all there."

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Then, as he stood, something seemed to snap within him. The reaction had come. He turned away and fell back limp against the steel bars of the vault, his face in his hands. In the silence eye met eye inquiringly. What did it all mean? What was the man driving at? Was it merely a confession? Or was there some deeper significance? Pent-up curiosity burst into questions—a dozen of them, a thousand. The little throng broke all at once into a babbling.

By an effort Jim Warren threw off the weakness that seemed to be crushing him.

“God only knows the lies I have told, the tricks I have played, the deceptions I have practised to make all this possible,” he said bitterly. “For six months I have lived in an atmosphere polluted by the filth and stench of dishonesty. I had to bring myself down to the moral level of these two.” He turned fiercely upon Franques and Lewis. “I did it. There is not a grafter in the legislature, not a corruptionist in

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the lobby, not a crook in all the game, that I haven't met and done business with. I was one of them. I lived their lives. I got my share and more, all with one purpose in view—the cleaning out of men of their ilk."

Puzzled glances passed from man to man. Jim Warren stared dully at the mute inquiry in the faces of these men.

"Haven't I made myself clear?" he asked. "Don't you see it was all a put-up job? That I have taken their bribes only in order to jail them? That every cent I have taken is there? Don't you see?"

"Ah, tell it to Sweeney!" Lewis broke out suddenly. "You were caught with the goods and now you're trying to get out. You, the honest labor man! You, the man whom money couldn't touch! You, the—"

"Just a minute, please," Jim Warren interrupted curtly. "Don't you gentlemen get what I'm driving at?" This to the reporters.

"You see, Mr. Warren," one of them ven-

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tured hesitatingly, "it might be either way—as you say or as Mr. Lewis says. Of course, the manner in which it all came about would have to be considered ; so—"

He stopped. Mr. Chisholm came forward and laid a friendly hand on Jim Warren's shoulder. Jim Warren looked around at him blankly.

"The sealed packet you first deposited in the vault," Mr. Chisholm reminded him.

Jim Warren seemed dazed. After a moment the light of understanding flashed in his eyes. He hadn't thought of that packet in the stress of all that had gone before. He turned to the plain-clothes man.

"There's one more envelope in the box," he said. "Be good enough to note the date on that envelope and on the affidavits attached ; then open it and read the statement inside.

The officer drew forth the packet.

"Deposited September twenty-second, in presence of three witnesses, whose affidavits

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are attached hereto,' " he read on the back of the envelope. Then he read the affidavits.

"Please remember that the election was on November fifteenth," Jim Warren requested.

The plain-clothes man drew a single type-written sheet from the envelope, glanced at it, cleared his throat and read:

"This statement is deposited, as the date on the envelope will show, nearly two months before election. It is a declaration of principles.

"I have made a deal by which Franques is to betray Francis Everard Lewis into my hands. There is every possibility that I will be elected to succeed Lewis, in which event I pledge myself—

"First: To break my bargain with Franques and rid myself of him immediately after election. I don't know his motives. I only know he is a crook and he thinks I'm a fool.

"Second: With the one idea of cleaning out the grafters and corruptionists, who are re-

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puted to be practically in control of the legislative machinery of this state, I shall play their own game and accept every bribe, every recompense in any form, that is offered to me.

"Third: As these moneys come into my possession I shall deposit them in this vault, with the name of every man whom I know to have shared the bribe.

"Fourth: I pledge myself to open this vault in the presence of witnesses and make public its contents on or before June sixth, following this date, in the manner that seems most fitting."

There was a long, tense silence. Came at last a deep breath of relief from the press collectively, then a rush of questions. The reporters saw it at last. 'Twas all a trick, a put-up job, just as he had explained. The ultimate effect of it no man might tell.

"Boys, I'd like to call your attention to the fact that to-day is June fourth," said Jim War-

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ren. "I'll just add that, after I understood the crookedness existing in the state, this came to me as a possible way of exposing it all and ridding the state of the men who are responsible for it. It was a sort of joke at first. It didn't strike me as being very serious. I knew they played the game with marked cards; I thought it would be amusing to sit in their game with cards of my own marking. I didn't dream of the disaster that would come, for it is a disaster. Our state will be the laughing-stock of the world, but it will be clean. After all, that was what I was aiming at."

He stopped and gazed straight into the eyes of Franques and Lewis—gazed until they looked away. Neither said a word.

"Just one other thing, boys," he went on. "Financially I am ruined. I spent every penny I had in the world living up to this reputation of a grafter which I had built about myself." He smiled wearily. "This is my record—all of it. Please say for me that I am standing on

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that record as a candidate for governor of this state." He extended both hands toward the plain-clothes man. "I am your prisoner. Are you going to put handcuffs on me?"

CHAPTER XXVI

FRANQUES PAYS A DEBT

HUGE, startled-looking type blared the story of graft to the world along with the extraordinary manner of its revealing, whereupon Jim Warren's state rose up and bellowed its indignation at the conditions he had shown. He had fired the fuse—the bomb of public wrath blew up with a roar that was heard all over the country. Immaculate reputations, shorn to their bare pelts, scuttled hither and thither, seeking a knot-hole wherein to hide their nakedness from the mighty blast of popular fury. There was a bandying of epithets, of threats, of ugly phrases, of recrimination; a laying together of cunning political heads and a sudden and mysterious thinning out of those legislators whose names occupied the more con-

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spicuous places on the roll of dishonor. The newspapers, always intrinsically right, flung a slogan across the sky: "Clean the capitol! Complete the work Jim Warren has begun!" It was a tribute to the maker of plows. He had done the impossible thing.

On the afternoon of his arrest Jim Warren had been arraigned and remanded in the custody of his attorney. Afterward he had returned to his apartments at the hotel and there wearily he had flung himself down to think upon many things. He had turned the trick! He had no fears as to his future; the public would take care of that. Its stamp of approval was already his; . . . but would *she* approve? After all, her approval meant more than anything else in the whole world. Even if she did approve, what would come after? . . . If only her father, Dwight Tillinghast, had withdrawn as he had requested! Of course he couldn't give him any inkling of what was to come, but—if he only had!

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The telephone rang.

"Mr. Franques is in the office, sir," said the operator. "He wants to know if you can see him in your committee-room to-morrow morning at half-past ten?"

"Franques!" Jim Warren repeated in perplexity. He was thoughtful for a second. "Tell him yes," he directed.

Fulsome praise in the morning papers brought no exultation to Jim Warren. There was little criticism of the methods he had employed to bare the rottenness of it all—radical methods, yes; unheard of, even; but evidently they had been necessary. Obviously here was a reformer who was bent upon reforming. Regardless of the manner of it, the power of the press was pledged to him unanimously. Jim Warren merely glanced at the morning headlines and went his way to the capitol. Here was public approval; . . . but would she approve?

There was a sudden and tense silence in the

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legislative chamber when Jim Warren entered, five minutes after the speaker's gavel had fallen. He glanced over the huge hall once—it was dotted here and there by an unoccupied desk—then went on to his seat. Three or four men came over and spoke to him. Their voices were very far away; it was of no consequence what they said. There was only one thought in his mind: . . . Would she approve?

Sharply at half-past ten o'clock Franques' card was laid on Jim Warren's desk; he arose and went into the committee-room. Franques, shabby, dusty-looking, lank, was standing beside the long table twisting his hat idly in his hands. There was something pathetic in the bent figure; the inscrutable face challenged his curiosity.

"Good morning, Franques," he greeted pleasantly.

"Good morning, sir," Franques said deferentially. He shambled a little as he stood. "I

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sort of felt, sir, that I had an explanation coming to you, and—”

“Not at all,” Jim Warren interrupted courteously. “You owed me something unpleasant for the turndown I gave you six or eight months ago. You framed up this bribe to pay for it, after I had made it possible; but it just so happened that your plan fitted into mine.”

“It isn’t that, sir,” Franques explained. He glanced up at the clock. “After to-day it’s hardly probable that you will—will see me again, and I felt that I wanted to make you understand that I think what you’ve—you’ve done is right. I thought it all out yesterday afternoon and last night. I—I just wanted to tell you.”

There was a strange softening about the evil eyes, a tremor about the rigid, thin-lipped mouth.

“I’m getting to be an old man, Mr. Warren,” Franques went on slowly, “and I’ve been a crook all my life. I’m tired of it; and I’m not

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all bad, sir. I've picked pockets and forged checks, and snatched purses and looted houses. That's how I met Lewis ten or twelve years ago. He was practising law at the time and he got me out of some trouble. After that I came to work for him. You know how—"

"I know, yes," said Jim Warren; "but why are you telling me all this?"—curiously.

"I don't know, sir," was the reply. There was a mistiness in the evil eyes; again Franques glanced up at the clock. "I don't know. I only thought I wanted you to know. I won't see you any more, or—" He stopped and muttered incoherently.

"You're going away, then?" Jim Warren was puzzled.

"Yes, sir—for all time!"—hesitatingly. "You see, Lewis and my daughter—I had a daughter"—he rambled on irrelevantly—"Lewis and my daughter—until he met Miss Tillinghast, you understand. She is dead, sir—my daughter. . . . She was to be Lewis'

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wife. . . . It was grief. . . . I tried to smash Lewis—ruin him; you upset my plans. . . . He doesn't know she's dead. . . . It's just as well. . . . He will be here in a few minutes now."

. . . There came a murmurous, menacing roar through the open windows. Jim Warren turned away from Franques and glanced out. It was a crowd, a throng, a mob—swarming up the hill toward the capitol. Blue-coated policemen struggled vainly here and there to restrain them. . . . Franques was staring at Jim Warren glassily.

"He will be here in a few minutes," he repeated dully.

"Who will be here?" Jim Warren demanded sharply.

"Lewis, sir," was the reply. "He's been avoiding me; I haven't been able to get to him; he's afraid of me. So last night I wrote him a note, sir, asking him to come here at eleven o'clock; and I signed your name to it. He

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thinks he can make a deal with you. He wouldn't have come otherwise." He laughed vacantly.

"Signed my name to it?" Jim Warren repeated in bewilderment. "What for? What are you driving at? Why do you want him here?"

. . . The mob was just outside, underneath the windows of the capitol, bawling imprecations, jeering, hooting. Now and then, rhythmically from a thousand throats, came the cry: "Clean the capitol!" Again Jim Warren glanced out of the window anxiously, with apprehension on his freckled face. . . .

"Why did you want Lewis here?" He had turned upon Franques.

"I'm going to kill him, sir," said Franques simply.

"Franques!" Jim Warren seized this man who was growing old, going mad here before his very eyes. "Franques! What's the matter with you? Are you crazy?"

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"I'm going to kill him!" Franques repeated.

. . . The incoherent roar of the mob chorused individual names now. "Lewis!" Repeated a dozen times, it came hurtling through the windows. "Tyson!" and "Dalrymple!" and "Hall!" and the rest of them. Smouldering anger had burst into flame. Here was outraged decency bent upon destruction. . . .

The door opened suddenly and Lewis, white-faced, stepped into the room. Franques saw him and laughed outright. His right hand darted to his hip pocket and Jim Warren caught the glint of a nicked revolver as it was raised again. He brought one clenched fist down in a sweeping, smashing blow. It caught Franques' wrist and the revolver clattered on the floor. Jim Warren picked it up. Lewis, motionless, pallid, was merely looking on.

"Franques, don't make a fool of yourself!" Jim Warren said, not unkindly. "You're not well."

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Franques was staring down at his limp right hand.

"I think you've broken my wrist, sir," he said.

Suddenly his face went white beneath its swarthiness; he reeled and collapsed. Jim Warren gathered him up as he would a child and laid him upon the couch. Again the door opened and an excited messenger from the chamber thrust in his head.

"The speaker wants you in the house at once, sir," he said to Jim Warren hurriedly.

Jim Warren nodded; the messenger vanished as swiftly as he had come.

"Lewis," and Jim Warren's voice was one of quick command, "when I go out of this room lock the door behind me. Don't let any one enter in my absence; and if you love yourself don't show your face at either of those windows. They're mad with anger out there. They want you. What they would do to you,

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you can guess. I'll try to disperse the crowd. When they have gone—all of 'em—you may unlock the door and go. And see that Franques gets out all right. That's all."

Jim Warren ran lightly along the hall toward the chamber. As he entered, Dalrymple's voice came shrilly above the hubbub of the mob.

"The governor should call out the troops!" he shouted. "It's revolution. Our lives are not safe!"

"It's the protest of honesty against the damnable crookedness of men of your type!" Jim Warren shouted from the center of the floor. He turned to the speaker: "I am informed, sir," he said in quite another tone, "that you want me."

"This mob," and Tillinghast waved a hand toward the outside—"they're threatening violence. You are responsible for this. Can you stop it?"

"Thank God, I *am* responsible for it!" retorted Jim Warren.

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He strode down the aisle, through a window and out upon the balcony overlooking the crowd. The jeering became a cheering, a rolling wave of approbation. Jim Warren, quizzical of eye and with that whimsical grin upon his lips, stepped to the front of the balcony and lifted his hand. Instantly there was silence, broken by a voice he knew:

"Oh, you Jim Warren! You went to 'em, didn't you, boy?"

"Hello there, Bob Allaire!" Jim Warren called.

There was a roar of laughter. When it had subsided anger had passed; there remained only a crowd of a thousand or more men, smiling and expectant.

"Now, boys," said Jim Warren quietly, "we appreciate this little visit, but you're interfering with the business of the capitol. We're not going to do anything foolish, but we're all going home to dinner, aren't we? Take my word for it—there won't be any more crooks up here

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for three years to come, because I'm going to be the next governor of this state. Am I?"

"You are!" It was a mighty bellowing, and it went ringing down the streets for ten minutes, as the crowd went about its business.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE LAST STAND

FROM his eerie office, overlooking the city of New York, Mr. Pointer loosed the terse command of the combined interests: "Smash Jim Warren!" In the solitude of his apartments in the city of Sandringham, Lewis pondered that deeply for forty-eight hours, after which he talked it over with Dwight Tillinghast far into the night.

"There's still a good chance for pulling you through," he assured the honorable speaker. "Things are not so rosy as they were, but still there's a good chance. The interests are willing to spend money—do you understand? The primaries for the election of delegates to the convention that will nominate the governor are still some weeks off. If we get to this thing now we can do things."

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"Do you mean that this Jim Warren—this maker of plows—actually has a chance to defeat me?" Tillinghast demanded in pompous astonishment. "Why, he's nobody; I'm worth millions." His fat eyes narrowed cunningly and he tapped Lewis' knee with a pudgy finger. "I'm willing to spend some money myself. I don't relish the idea of being defeated by a—by a"—he was puffing in his indignation—"a person from the lower walks of life."

"Jim Warren has a chance, yes," Lewis confessed. "I've noticed that affairs in this world are not always as we would have them. These 'persons from the lower walks of life' occasionally butt in and kick up a devil of a row. Meanwhile, if you're willing to spend money and the people I represent are willing to spend money, together we may do anything."

"We'll defeat Jim Warren certainly," Tillinghast declared.

After that interview Lewis betook himself to New York for a conference with the spidery,

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crabbed Mr. Pointer, who furnished expert political advice to the interests for a consideration. If Mr. Pointer was delighted to see him, he concealed it most effectually.

"A pretty mess you made of it in your state," he complained crustily.

"The—the circumstances were unusual," Lewis faltered in self-defense.

"Circumstances have nothing to do with it," said Mr. Pointer acridly. "There are no circumstances that one can't twist around to suit oneself if one goes at it properly and at the right time. You'll remember I advised you it would be best for you to quit before—"

"I couldn't," Lewis expostulated. "It would have done me as much harm as—"

"And instead of that you insisted upon making a fool of yourself!" Mr. Pointer went on, heedless of the interruption. "Now, how are you going to elect your governor? Is Tillinghast still your man?"

"He is, yes; he's there to stick."

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"Of course, he'll stick, but will he be elected?" Mr. Pointer wanted to know. "I mean will he be even nominated? Can you pull that? Primaries are pretty close up and this man Jim Warren seems to have turned the world upside down. Can you nominate Tillinghast?"

Lewis' face flushed. Always he had feared this shriveled little man and always he had longed to throttle him. He was merciless, relentless, offensively to the point.

"I'll not only nominate him, but I'll elect him," he boasted out of the anger in his heart. "The interests will have to stick to me, of course. It may cost half a million to do it," he added tentatively.

"The cost is of no consequence," Mr. Pointer declared impatiently. "Show me where you spend your money—every cent of it—and your vouchers will be honored up to a quarter of a million; let Tillinghast put up the rest of it. We'll do this; but, if you don't elect Tilling-

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hast, that is the end. It won't be necessary even to write me explaining why. We don't want excuses; we want results. There are many things we want to do in your state and we must put your man across. If you don't—as I said."

Lewis nodded his head. He knew the slim chance he had—no one knew better. It was to be a fight for his political existence. If it failed—

"You said something about marrying Tillinghast's daughter," Mr. Pointer went on. "Have you?"

"Our marriage is to take place immediately after Tillinghast becomes governor," Lewis explained.

"All the better for us," and the little man rasped his skinny hands together. "I think you said she was worth a million in her own right—eh? You will have another incentive to put Tillinghast through."

Mr. Pointer cackled dryly and leered at

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Lewis. The one spark of decency within Lewis flamed for an instant, then was extinguished by his sordid lust of money.

"There's another matter, too," Mr. Pointer resumed. "You never returned those original letters to me."

"Well—er—the fact is, the matter had slipped my mind," Lewis apologized lamely. "The necessity for—"

"The matter hasn't slipped mine," interrupted the little man curtly. "Your real purpose in hanging on to them, of course, is to try to hold us up if we throw you down. Is that the scheme? We'll just stop that. I'll take the responsibility if Jim Warren produces the photographs at any time."

"But—" Lewis started to protest.

"No buts about it," exclaimed Mr. Pointer. "Either send me those originals at once or we'll call off everything and I'll put the campaign in that state in the hands of another man." His thin, piping voice hardened. "When you send

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those letters you may consider this other deal on."

"I've read all of it—every line of everything," Edna was saying.

"Was I right or wrong?" Jim Warren insisted.

"I don't know," the girl declared helplessly. Her slim fingers were interlaced tightly. "It was all so horrid and strange and dishonest. I don't know!"

With darkened brows, Jim Warren stood looking down upon the sheen of her hair. For a long time he said nothing. It had been weary waiting and he had lost. His lips were crushed together.

"I didn't know anything about politics until less than a year ago," he said at last, "but it seems that the game, at least in this state, has been honeycombed with dishonesty and graft for years. It was an evil! The right man in the right place could remedy it. I took the

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only way—and, whatever else may result from it, I won. You I have lost, but the state is clean and will remain clean for the next three years.”

Edna raised her eyes and stared at him breathlessly. His face was set, his eyes smouldering; and yet beneath the fire of them was a—a something that caused her to look down again.

“You hope to be the next governor?” she asked.

“I will be the next governor. I’ve got to be the next governor to finish the work I have started.”

“And my father?”—weakly.

Jim Warren turned away from her suddenly. The highest office in his state was his by right—he had gone through mire and mud to win it. Her father! There came a powerful revulsion of feeling—and, after a little, a strange, quixotic idea. After all, did his state need him as he needed her? He extended his clenched hands toward her.

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"Shall I withdraw?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"I don't know; it wouldn't be fair."

"Would it make you any happier if I withdrew?"

"Please—please!" She extended both hands in a pleading gesture he knew.

"Yes or no?" He seized her hands and dragged her to her feet. "Yes or no? It's with you." His eyes were blazing into hers. "There's nothing on the face of God's earth I wouldn't do for you," he went on passionately. "After all, I suppose I'm as bad or worse than the rest of them; I, too, was a grafter. Yes or no?"

She looked away and struggled to free her hands.

"Look at me!" he commanded sharply.

"I'm very tired," she said. "Let me go."

"Yes or no?"

Slowly she raised her head and her lids lifted until her wonder eyes, dim with tears, met his.

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In them he read an answer—not an answer to the sordid question, but an answer to the one question that had been tormenting him. He drew her into his arms gently, very gently—and leaning over he pressed his lips to hers. She closed her eyes and her heart seemed stilled by the sheer joy of her awakening.

Dwight Tillinghast entered the room, followed by Lewis. Edna struggled; Jim Warren held her close, close, and met the eyes of the other two men defiantly.

“She’s mine!” he declared harshly. “Mine!—do you understand?”

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE NEXT GOVERNOR

THE moral sense of a rich man, dulled by ambition, came to itself in the next few weeks. When the session had closed and the grand jury had duly whitewashed those legislative grafters who dared to remain for it—and as duly indicted those who incontinently fled—then, and not until then, did Dwight Tillinghast awake to a full realization of the part he had played for Lewis and the part he would be called upon to play in the campaign for governor. The scales fell from his eyes and he stood aghast at the things he saw. He had known them all along in a vague, hazy sort of way, but somehow it was all different now. There was a contemptuous undercurrent of comment here and there that penetrated his hypocritical hide.

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Still eager, still determined, he had listened to Lewis' plans for the campaign against Jim Warren; suddenly he saw that it was hopeless. Out of that realization came the thought that he had almost given his daughter to this man whose name had become a stench in the public's nostrils—almost given her! Yes, he would have driven her into Lewis' arms at one time. He shuddered a little! After all, he had merely been a cat's-paw for Lewis; even if he became governor with Lewis' help it would be the same if he would go further.

There was a swish of skirts in the hall; Edna entered, and after her Jim Warren. Tillinghast rose and stood looking at them.

"Father, can you spare just a moment?" his daughter asked.

He nodded. Instinctively his eyes met Jim Warren's. Through the deep earnestness of that cerulean gaze he saw a glint of that whimsical boyishness of the maker of plows.

"It's merely that we want you to answer a

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question," Jim Warren explained. "Your daughter hasn't been able to decide whether she wants to be the daughter of the next governor of this state or the wife of the next governor of this state."

Tillinghast was staring at him, speechless; his slow-moving mind was not attuned to intricacies.

"I—I don't understand," he said after a moment.

"If I withdraw you'll be the next governor," Jim Warren continued frankly, "and if you withdraw I'll be the next governor. If one of us withdraws there is no man in the state who can beat the other—he's elected; if one of us doesn't withdraw it will be the most corrupt campaign this state has ever known. Votes are now being bought right and left; and you see—"

"I don't see at all!" declared Tillinghast.

"I mean—if your daughter says so—I'll withdraw in your favor," Jim Warren told

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him. "That's the question she can't answer; we brought it to you."

For a time Tillinghast merely stared at them in bewilderment. Edna was looking into his face smiling.

"You mean," he burst out suddenly, "that, after all you've done, you'll quit?"

Jim Warren nodded.

"I mean just that," he said. "But, whether I stick or quit, I'll ask a greater reward than all that."

He was looking at Edna; Tillinghast understood then. Suddenly he stretched out his hands toward his daughter; she nestled against his shoulder, weeping softly. Slowly his own head bent until his lips caressed her hair. The maker of plows stood abashed, counting his fingers like a school-boy.

"I think," said Tillinghast at last slowly—"I think you had better stick, Mr. Warren. I was just about making up my mind that I'd had enough. I'm only beginning to see how—how

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bad it all is. You've gone so far in your efforts to clean out this state—take the fight on to the end. You're the man to do it."

A graven-faced servant entered.

"Mr. Francis Everard Lewis," he announced.

Tillinghast took the hand Jim Warren offered and laid Edna's in it. Then he turned to the servant.

"Tell Mr. Lewis that I am not at home—and will not be at home to him again," he directed.

It was weeks after that day, when a convention had gone mad at the mere mention of Jim Warren's name, that Edna and he were talking. She was sitting gazing into the smouldering fire, with one of his hands clasped between her own.

"When did you first realize that I—I liked you?" she demanded. "I don't mean loved you—just liked you?"

"The day I found a small cluster of violets

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on my desk—the opening day of the session,” he told her.

“Violets?” she asked. “What violets? Do you flatter yourself that I sent them? Well, I didn’t.”

He kissed her; she laughed.

“Well, anyway, I knew every desk would have flowers on it, except possibly yours, and I didn’t want you to feel that no one remembered you,” she explained. “And you were not supposed to know who sent them. There was no card.”

THE END

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